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The Popular Magazine

MAY
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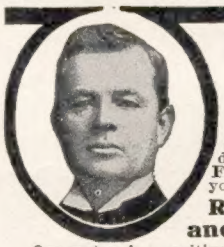

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MONTH-END EDITION

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Twice-a-month Publication Issued by STREET & SMITH, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York.
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Cucumbers *vs.* Corporations

By

FRANKLIN O. KING

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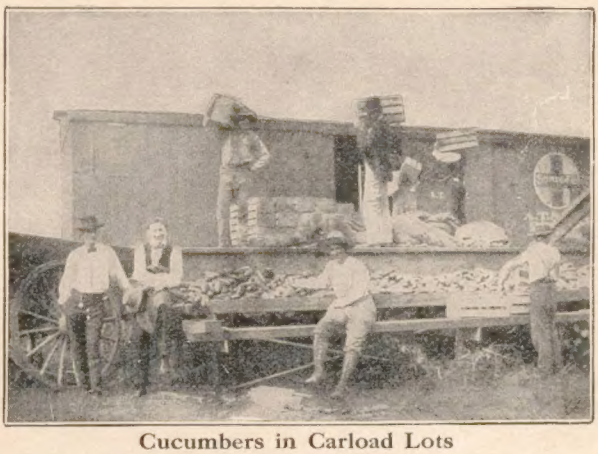
You Cannot "Make a Silk Purse out of a Sow's Ear," nor "Gather Figs from Thistles." Mincing Matters Will not Mend Them, and the Sooner You Open Your Eyes to Existing Conditions, the Quicker You Will Take Steps to Get Out of the Rut into which You have Fallen.

When You Get Your Pay Envelope Saturday Night, You Know Full well where almost Every Dollar of It is Bound to Go. After the Butcher and Baker and Candlestick-Maker—and the Landlord—Get Theirs, there isn't Much Left for Anybody Else. You have to Work Harder to Get a Dollar Today than ever Before, and the same Dollar will Buy Less than at any Time in Our History.



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* * *

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May 15 issue Popular Magazine.

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XX. MAY 15, 1911. No. 3.

The Cat's-Paw

By George Randolph Chester

Author of "The Breaking of Chamberlain," Etc.

This is the second in a series of new stories by the author of "Get-rich-quick Wallingford." The first appeared in the March month-end number of the POPULAR, and was the story of a great one-man insurance company and the attempt of the political boss of the State to secure the company for himself. "The Cat's-Paw" is an equally strong business-political novel, in which you will find many of the characters you met in "The Breaking of Chamberlain." It is intense, dramatic, yet through it all runs that vein of humor for which Mr. Chester is famous.

(*A Complete Novel*)

IN reality, Bailey Cooper was making his maiden speech in the legislature to Margaret Holtzman, a hundred miles away; in seeming, he was pouring upon his fellow patriots in the "legislative halls of his gul-lorius State" the perfervid oratory which had made of him a statesman upon the very crest of the "reform wave."

An appeal for the immediate rescue of his mangled and bleeding country could have been no more impassioned than his clanging of the wild tocsin upon this memorable occasion, and his rich, sonorous voice, vibrating to the very dome of that historic home of patriotic urgency, attracted considerable attention.

Old Pop Gresham, the administration wheel horse from Pickerel County, sitting at his solitary desk two aisles away, and writing a letter to a troublesome constituent, looked up as much as twice, and frowned as he tried to concentrate.

Cap Digglesby, the seared and calloused leader of the opposition, sat over in his isolated corner, figuring some deep problems out of his check stubs, but he looked up occasionally and smiled as he recognized the fresh young blood which would need to be salted before it could be of much use to the party.

Jim Donovan, discussing in whispers with Calvin T. Luther, both members of this administration, a neat but not gaudy little trick for capturing their own committee, once paused to grin and jerk his thumb in young Bailey's direction.

The bright-faced pages, earning their three dollars per day by quietly matching pennies, of course paid no attention, but the Speaker, methodically posting himself upon the moral conduct of the universe from his morning paper, was frequently reminded by that resonant voice to look at his watch.

The stirring tones penetrated even

into the smoking rooms, and Assemblyman Buckley, the leader of the administration and the undoubted right-hand man of Boss Sledge, attracted by the sound of an unfamiliar voice, came to the door for a moment, and looked across all the empty seats at the orator without approval, censure, or humor; only with professional studiousness.

Of course, the young Demosthenes, this being his first term, was clad befittingly in a black frock coat, which, he confessed to himself, set off his slender but athletic figure to excellent advantage.

Aside from that, he was a nice enough looking young fellow, with dark hair and eyes, a good-sized nose, and a clean-cut, earnest face, with thoroughly practicable knots of visible muscles at the hinges of his jaws.

"Who is it?" asked "Franchise" Walters, as Buckley came thoughtfully back to his favorite couch arm.

"The reform spasm from Ring County," replied Buckley, but without smiling. "It's a queer thing that Sledge can control the entire State most of the time, and his own city all the time, but can never send us a representative from his own county."

"Sometimes I think he prefers not to do so," mused Walters, thinking upon that eternal mystery of how Boss Sledge did it. "Just a comfortable working majority in the State, year in and year out, seems to keep him from becoming nervous."

They both paused to smile at the idea of big Ben Sledge, with a face like the sphinx—if one could imagine a surly, fat sphinx with a stubby mustache—becoming nervous over anything.

"I'll have to challenge your statement, however, that Sledge always controls his own city. You must have meant something else, in view of the terrific landslide which hit him down there this past fall."

"That's part of his control," laughed Buckley, stroking his gray mustache. "The Big Boy regards a reform movement and a municipal defeat, every five or six years, as a good, healthy purgative, which enables him to rid himself of the dead material in his political system."

"They put an earnest member over on him this time," returned Walters, holding up the forefinger with which he usually listened. "Hear the voice in the wilderness."

The voice in the wilderness was, at that moment, throwing the circumambient atmosphere into quite a flutter. A mouse in the deserted visitors' gallery, sliding peacefully in the direction of a hitherto unfound crumb, turned suddenly and shot to its hole.

Assemblyman Dalwood, who had occupied the same ink-drooled desk since the year the dome was finished, looked up and smiled beatifically; he had heard once more!

Up in the reporters' gallery, Johnson, who furnished news to the *Blade*, the rabidly partisan Independent Sledge paper from the orator's home city, awoke, and yawned, and, bethinking himself of his duty, wrote:

> At this juncture Assemblyman Bailey Cooper, the boy orator from Ring County, was permitted to speak for fifteen minutes on the prehistoric and perennial Canal bill.

At the same moment, Cassidy, who furnished news to the *Courier*, the anti-administration paper, which had conducted the reform wave, elected Cooper, and defeated "the gang," and who had been drearily listening, with the knowledge, born of bitter experience, that a beautiful voice cannot be put into type, brightened, and wrote:

> In the midst of a brilliant and forceful speech upon the Canal bill this afternoon, Ring County's wonderfully gifted young orator, Assemblyman Bailey Cooper, once more brought the attention of the public to the often condemned Summit Pike.
>
> "When will the State recognize her paternal duties to the people?" demanded Assemblyman Cooper, in tones so fervent and passionate that even the old stagers, such as Gresham, Donovan, Luther, Buckley, Walters, and Dolwood, sat up and took notice. "Too long has this sleeping and decrepit commonwealth, forgetting in slothful slumber the glories of her beneficent past, permitted her moss-grown institutions to sap the resources of her stalwart and loyal citizenry! Too long has she permitted selfish private gain to feast upon the heart's blood of the public! Too long has she confused statesmanship

with politics, and politics with business! She must *awake!* I say, she must AWAKE from this lethargy, and she must present, as a gift of gracious reparation to the people, the public utilities which, paid for by the people, should be free as the precious life-giving air which God has bestowed upon rich and poor alike in such abundance that, thank Heaven, no grasping, politics-nurtured monopoly can claim it for its own! (Applause and laughter.) In the list of such utilities I refer not only to the graft-ridden Sequoi Canal, but to many other like private enterprises which should be public property, including, first and foremost, the disgraceful and infamous Summit Pike, which, winding its fifteen miles of rutted, and bowldered, and puddled roadway through the richest section of Ring County, and connecting the wealthiest city in the State with its tributary sister communities, and kept in a more disreputable condition of no repair than any barnyard lane, has been paid for a hundred times over by the people, who have not got it yet! (Much laughter.) I call upon the State, in the name of the sovereign people whom I represent, to condemn, and purchase, and put in repair, and present to her grateful children what is now their chiefest eyesore, but would be their chiefest pride, the Summit Pike!"

There was more, but Cassidy did not bother with it, and presently the speaker of the Assembly, discovering with relief that the brilliant young orator's fifteen minutes were up, enforced the schedule, much to the consternation and dismay of Bailey Cooper, who, though he had talked as rapidly as possible, had not yet approached his smashing arguments in favor of the Canal bill.

With reluctance and a dry throat, he gathered up his papers and left, to meet members, visitors, and reporters pouring into the empty Assembly; for Buckley, whose speaking voice was a cackle, and whose gestures were patterned after a Holland windmill, was to speak in defense of the notorious traction franchise grab. It had to be a clever speech to uphold so odoriferous a steal —and it would be.

Somewhat comforted by the fact that the public at least would get all his thought, young Cooper hurried up into the press gallery, and performed a neglected duty by distributing copies of his complete speech to all the reporters. Johnson, of the *Blade,* thanked him cordially, and threw the manuscript away in plain sight; but Cassidy, of the *Courier,* whom Bailey knew to be his firm adherent and supporter, did not throw it away until after he was gone.

As Margaret Holtzman's father, being a strong administration voter, took only the *Blade,* what Johnson had said about young Cooper's being allowed to talk for fifteen minutes was all she read of Bailey's speech. To make sure that she would get it, Bailey sent her a printed copy, but she thought it was another music catalogue, and the kitchen maid used it to roll into a paper stopper for a vinegar jug!

II.

Carl Schmitt loafed against the edge of the Holtzman piano rather more than Bailey Cooper would have liked, had that earnest young statesman been at home; and Margaret Holtzman talked about Bailey Cooper to Carl Schmitt, rather more than that rising young politician liked when he was there.

Just to even up matters, in her friendly letters to Bailey, she frequently mentioned the calls of Carl, so that, of the three, the girl, at least, was quite happy. She played Von Suppé and Wagner for her father, Mendelssohn and Schubert for Bailey, and ragtime for Carl with equal pleasure, and, if she had any serious moments at this juncture, either kept them to herself or confided them to her mother, after they had all gone to bed and Mrs. Holtzman had slipped in to see if there was too much or too little draft, or too much or too little covering, or too much or too little anything.

Carl, large and florid of face, and decorated with a carefully curled, glossy brown mustache, dressed in his neatly pressed blue suit with the green pin stripes and wearing his favorite plaid silk cravat over his lavender shirt, was at the Holtzman home upon the morning after Assemblyman Cooper had stirred the Assembly to its profoundest depths with his speech.

Before entering, Carl paused at the gate to once more appraise the Holtzman home.

It was an excellent piece of property, and would be Margaret's when her father and mother died; also there was a four-story, brick store and office building on Main Street to be considered, a row of eight splendidly renting small cottages, and nobody knew how much money in building loan and other stocks; and besides all this was the high-class catering business which had produced these riches, and which, in itself, had sprung from a small bakery.

Truly Margaret Holtzman was a beautiful girl, a charming girl, and a desirable girl! If the place were his, Carl would cut a new driveway out through the edge of the rose garden and turn the barn into a garage.

He was a little surprised to find Mr. Holtzman in the parlor with Margaret at this hour, but a red flannel cloth around Holtzman's neck was ample explanation.

He arose as Carl came in, and presented his hand, which young Schmitt shook effusively and held long, after the fashion of those who make their living by what other people think of them; and he laughed quite heartily as he said "Good morning," as if the unexpected meeting with Holtzman were the happiest surprise that this already promising day could hold for him.

After this, Holtzman sat down again, and held young Schmitt in suspended judgment as he had for five years.

"I've been trying to bring you these two songs for a week," Carl said to Margaret, "so I just called on my way downtown. Anyhow, I want to ask you to go to the Linden Club ball on the fourteenth."

"I'll be glad to go," she replied, with a questioning look toward her father, who nodded slightly, his eyes still fixed in somber speculation upon the dashing Carl. "I thank you for the music, too," and she glanced demurely down to see if they were not the ten-cent editions. They were. "Bailey made his first speech yesterday," she added.

Carl's complacency received an immediate jar. Couldn't she say anything without dragging in Bailey's name?

"Yes, so I see by the *Courier*," he returned. "Put himself in bad the first crack out of the box. What do you think, Holtzman? The first chance he gets he takes a fall out of Sledge and all the things that Sledge ever did or didn't do. The craziest scheme of all, though, is that he wants the State to buy up the Summit Pike and make a free road of it."

"Well, they ought to do it," declared Margaret. "It's the worst road I ever saw, and any one who has to stop and pay toll to drive over it is being robbed."

"But you don't understand, Margaret," protested Carl. "Sledge has a good reason for leaving that a toll road, or he'd have made it free a long time ago. Young Cooper will spill the beans if he don't let Sledge alone."

Rudolph Holtzman stopped twirling his thumbs in the immediate vicinity of his breakfast.

"Mr. Sledge has done more good for this city than all the reformers in the world," he declared, with the positive conviction of a man who has made the same statement so often that he is bound to stick to it through thick and thin.

"But, father," objected Margaret; "Mr. Sledge is a thief, and the coarsest-looking man I ever saw."

"Mr. Sledge is not a thief," denied her father emphatically. "He says it himself. I have voted for his candidates for many years, and ever since I did so I have made money in my good honest business. Politics is a business itself, and a man like Mr. Sledge runs a big city like this well, and pays himself well for running it. Is that being a thief?"

Margaret hesitated. She had Bailey Cooper's positive, impassioned, and oft-reiterated statements that Sledge should be incarcerated in eight jails at once, and her father's that Sledge should have a halo.

"I'm sure I'm not competent to decide," she finally admitted; "but at the same time I'm sure he is."

"That is enough," said her father,

rising and unpinning the flannel from his throat. "Politics is not for women. I am going down to my office."

"But, father; your throat!" pleaded Margaret, instantly worried.

"I am going down to my office," he stated, in a tone so precisely like his former one that the phrase might have been repeated by a phonograph; and with his flannel bandage in his hand he stalked out into the hall and upstairs.

He came down presently, followed from landing to landing by the constant protests of Mrs. Holtzman, a plump and red-cheeked woman of over forty, who still held the red-flannel bandage out before her in both hands, as if upon it the salvation of the world depended.

To all her importunities her husband turned an ear so calmly deaf that she might as well have been voiceless; but he was gracious enough to kiss both his wife and daughter before he left the door with Carl.

Margaret called after young Schmitt: "I wish you'd bring me your *Courier,* Carl. I want to read what Bailey said."

"Politics is not for women," declared Carl, but to this he added his jovial laugh so she could not know whether he meant it or not.

She did gather, however, that she was not to receive that copy of the *Courier,* so she borrowed the paper from a neighbor, and tried to become interested, and turned to a full-page, itemized advertisement of a white-goods sale. She got some of the speech, however, and admired it very much.

"I'm glad you told her that," remarked Carl, as the two men waited on the corner for the car. "Politics is not for women."

Holtzman, rather short, rather plump, wearing clothes which fitted him like the cover on a baseball, and looking every inch the prosperous, level-headed, honest German-American citizen that he was, gazed somberly for a moment upon Carl Schmitt.

"Margaret is a smart girl," he said.

III.

The only two things Ben Sledge ever read were the denominations of greenbacks and the souls of men. His minor reading was done for him by his lesser satellites, chief among whom was Doc Turner. Common report had it that Doc rolled out of bed every morning wearing his faded and dusty old brown derby, and the half-chewed stub of an expired cigar in his mouth; for no man had ever seen Doc in any other guise, except when removing the cigar stub long enough to take a drink.

His was the self-appointed task of reading and absorbing every day the political news in all the four papers published in the city, and of sifting and sorting this news, and condensing it, so that he might tell the Big Boy, in few words and an offhand manner, the things of importance in their all-sufficient world.

He had just finished this task at a little side table in the Occident Saloon, and was peering expectantly through the innumerable pouch rings of his eyes at the semisomnolent row of customers at the bar, when Carl Schmitt laughed his way into the place, and began passing happy handshakes about with the most reckless abandon.

They were rather gloomy about his cordiality in this gathering, for, all being habitués, and bound together by a common understanding, they were "next." There being no "live ones" in the place to impress with inwardly gnawing generosity, or whom to impregnate with free-handed hospitality by a slight leaven of it, Carl sat at Doc Turner's table, and ordered himself a simple glass of beer, first glancing, as all the others had done upon their entrance, in the direction of the little, wooden-partitioned room in the rear. There was no light in it. Sledge had not yet come.

"Well, Doc, what's the news?" asked Carl, by way of being friendly.

"Nothin'," grunted Doc, with professional caution.

If the President of the United States had been assassinated, Doc would not

have whispered it to his own infant son until he had first discussed the matter with Sledge, with a recommendation for action. If out of a thousand suggestions Sledge accepted one which proved a winner, there was a "bit" in it for Doc, and business was business!

"I see Bailey Cooper's bound to shut himself out of politics," offered Carl, who was at all times compelled to talk, whether he had a willing listener or not, and who was thick-skinned enough to laugh off any rebuff.

"Is he?" inquired Doc, screwing up his pouch rings until only the faintest points of high light shone through the infinitesimal slits where his eyes should have been. While entirely unwilling to dispense information, he was entirely willing to receive it, since even out of the mouths of sapheads like Carl might come the germ of words of wisdom.

"Is he!" repeated Carl, with huge contempt, placing upon the tray of Adolph—Adolph with the sour mouth and smiling mustache—one lone nickel. "He spilled the beans yesterday; that's all. Made his first speech in the legislature, and roasted all the things that the *Courier* has been roasting Sledge about since I was a kid. Jumped on the Summit Pike for one of 'em. Say! it was a scream the way he wanted the State to buy that up and give it to the people."

Doc Turner, eying Carl's nice-looking glass of beer, and wiping his straggling gray mustache reflectively, nodded his head to show that he was listening. He had most carefully read Assemblyman Cooper's smashing speech, and was of much the same opinion as Carl, but he was willing to have all the light he could upon the subject before he saw the Big Boy.

"It's like I was telling Holtzman this morning," went on Carl, after a sharp intake of breath to heighten the flavor of his refreshing draft. "I says, Sledge never overlooks a bet, and, if he lets this Summit Pike stay private property for all these years, he's got his reasons."

A vague memory haunted Doc that Sledge had let slip an admission that some of these days he would put old Schmolling out of business; and Schmolling, Doc also vaguely remembered, was the president of the antiquated Summit Turnpike Company.

Carl talked on and on, merely for the pleasure of hearing his own voice, but he had dropped the germ of the word of wisdom, and Doc was no longer listening.

An electrical thrill ran through the room. A deep voice, husking its way through a fat throat, on the other side of the plate-mirrored screen which hid the Occident bar from the street, had just grunted:

"'Morn'."

This was the voice of power; the voice of authority; the voice of fate; the voice of Sledge!

Adolph, allowing two beers to grow flat, stale, and unprofitable upon his hastily set down tray, disappeared immediately into the dingy little back room, turned on the lights, dusted the big wooden armchair, and wiped into wet relief the million rings which a million liquor-stained glasses had left upon the cracked and warped round table top.

The two white-aproned bartenders, heretofore at cynical ease, became at once furiously busy, one polishing glassware with all his might, and the other wiping up the bar with a splashing cloth which left it wetter than before, except that the wetness was evenly spread.

The neatly dressed man with the professional-looking whiskers turned half away from the seedy-looking, red-whiskered man with whom he had been talking, and felt hastily of his cravat.

The squat, broad-shouldered man with the bleary eyes and the ugly scar on his chin, who had been leaning with his back against the bar and both elbows upon it in a state of dull semi-trance, wheeled forward now, and rested upon only one elbow.

The group of three young men, whose faces showed that they had learned to suspend perpetual dissipation at precisely the safety point, paused in the act of shaking the longest dice game possible for the smallest pos-

sible priced drink, and strove to look businesslike.

At the far end of the bar two very prosperous and respectable-appearing gentlemen, one of whom looked as if he had always worn kid gloves, and the other of whom looked as if he had always been able to buy them, turned to each other with a sigh of relief.

Doc Turner hung upon its hook the last newspaper with which he had been engaged.

Carl Schmitt arose to put into immediate action his laugh and his happy handshake.

Hope sat enthroned on every brow, alertness in every eye, and around the corner of the screen came Ben Sledge!

Accompanied by his brains, in the quietly but quite properly attired person of Tom Bendix, he passed through the length of the barroom to the little room beyond, with a series of almost inaudible grunts and almost imperceptible nods for those who beamed with hope and thrilled with alertness.

Massive, shapeless, expressionless, he came among them as a very epitome of somber immutability; he passed on, and the lights seemed dimmer for the mere momentary presence of that gloomy face, with its pouched eyes, and its pouched cheeks, and its pouched chin, and its utter absence of the possibility of joy or sorrow, pleasure or pain, hope or fear, suppliance or mercy.

He disappeared into his room, and sighs of relief went up even from those who had been most anxious for his coming. This was the passage of a king!

Tom Bendix took for him the handshake and the unabashed greeting of Carl Schmitt; told the man with the professional-looking whiskers that he'd have to get some better influence behind him on that health-commissioner thing; gave the seedy, red-whiskered man two dollars; informed the human bulldog with the scar on his chin that there was nothing doing for a few days; advised two of the young men that they were still in line, and the third that he might go to work in the county clerk's office on Monday; then paused with cold courtesy to invite the kid-gloved man inside, at the same time stating to his companion that Sledge would see him in a few minutes.

The kid-gloved man's interview was very short, for the moment he entered, Sledge, already seated in his big arm-chair, said:

"If it's more money, no."

"But I don't understand it, Mr. Sledge," protested the other. "Your banks have always carried my paper until now, and on less security. My business is in better condition than usual. The banks refer me to you. Is it anything personal?"

"You're goin' broke inside of a year," declared Sledge, with no more emotion visible in his countenance than there would be in a cold apple dumpling.

The other man tremblingly reached for his handkerchief, and mopped his brow. It was suddenly adrip with perspiration.

"I don't see where I deserve this," he said brokenly, and then, his good heart supplying him with fresh, strong blood, he waged a noble fight against the inevitable; he explained, he cajoled, he begged, he threatened, then begged again, but through it all Sledge sat as immovable as a lump of graven clay, and at the close of the man's very last plea, his only word, the word of doom, the syllable of ultimate dramatic climax, was:

"Nix."

When the man had left the room, trying not to stagger, Sledge's only comment was to turn to Bendix and call the doomed one a foul name.

His offense had been a heinous one. He had said, in a semipublic gathering, that in the city now there were but three dangerous epidemics—typhoid, tuberculosis, and Sledge. For an epigram the man was to lose position, friends, and fortune; and Sledge was to make money by his loss; for Sledge's banks—Sledge was president of one, a director in four others, and a force beyond denial in all of them—held the foreclosures on the business of the luckless one, and had offers of tenantry, at higher rates, upon his location.

The next man in was there even a shorter time. His case was another banking one.

"The First National shut down on me yesterday," he said.

"I told 'em to," returned Sledge; "but it's a mistake. Tell Borden I said to let you have all you needed."

The man hesitated. He did not like to merely "tell" Borden, but he knew that Sledge never wrote anything, even to sign his name, if he could avoid it.

"Thank you," he said, and started for the door. Upon the threshold he turned. "By the way," he inquired, "would you mind telling me what you thought was the matter with me or with my business?"

"You're gettin' your money, ain't you?" demanded Sledge.

"Yes, that's so. Thank you," returned the man, and hastily disappeared.

"What was the matter with him?" asked Bendix.

Sledge almost smiled.

"Nothin'. I don't want him to feel too easy; that's all."

Doc Turner, seeing that the important conferences of the morning were over, ambled in at the door, waiting in hesitation just inside to see if he might be welcome. Sledge pushed a chair an inch or so from under the table with his foot, and then rang the bell.

Turner, needing no other invitation, sat down.

Adolph, at the sound of the bell, ordered two steins of beer and a high ball, the latter for Bendix.

Carl Schmitt wandered back to the edge of the door, hesitated, and wandered away again.

"Well, Doc, what's new to-day?" asked Bendix, smiling, for the busy-minded but feeble-willed Turner was a privileged character, and might sit in counsel with them where stronger men could not.

Doc accepted his daily fresh cigar, and felt of it carefully from end to end before he bit off the tip.

"The biggest thing is that young Cooper is kickin' on the Summit Pike," he said, and waited.

"I read about it," returned Bendix. "I don't see anything big in that. It's the same old talk."

Doc Turner, ever mindful of dramatic effect, paused to light his cigar.

"You ain't so strong for the pike or the pike owners, are you?" he surmised to Sledge.

Sledge shook his ponderous head sidewise about a quarter of an inch.

"Well," continued Doc, "young Cooper wants the State to condemn that pike, and buy it, and present it to the people."

"Yes, I read that, too," interrupted Bendix; but the eyes of Sledge moved the barest trifle in his direction, and he paused.

"Good game," observed Sledge.

Bendix stopped to consider the idea, and then he grinned.

"Funny none of us ever thought of that," he confessed. "It's a better scheme than mine; to buy up the pike, and repair it, and run it as a new corporation, under cover. To have the State buy it and present it to the people is a better bet. You ought to slip a century note in a plain envelope and mail it to young Cooper, anonymously, for that happy thought."

The eyes of Sledge half closed for an instant in assent.

"How do we do it?" he finally asked.

"Well, of course," answered Bendix, still smiling, "in order to present it to the people, we must buy it. Who owns it, Doc?"

"Stock company," returned Turner, fondling his cigar. "Dutch farmers along the route."

"Goes outside of Ring County, don't it?"

"Runs into the edge of two others besides Ring."

"That makes it a sure enough State affair,' announced Bendix, in relief. "Also, it makes the commissioners of three counties to be fixed."

Sledge gave a fractional nod of agreement.

"I know them all," he said.

"Easy money, then," declared Bendix. "First of all, we have to make the stockholders willing to sell; then we

have to get a good German-American cat's-paw who can buy for us. Unless we get that man, we'll have hard sledding."

"Young Schmitt's outside," suggested Turner, stroking his disreputably ragged gray mustache with the triumphant air of one who has carefully prepared for all emergencies.

Bendix made a wry face.

"He's about as useful as a soap bubble," he commented.

"He knows the German-American situation to a man—and a woman," stated Turner doggedly.

"He only has influence with one kind of German-American man—the young would-be sport," retorted Bendix; "and only one kind of German-American woman—his kind. He's a four-flusher; and the German-Americans are not that. I'm for 'em myself."

"Bring him in," directed Sledge.

Had Carl Schmitt been a dog, he would have wagged his tail upon being brought directly into the Presence; as it was, he insisted upon shaking hands heartily all around, and upon pushing the button.

"What'll you have?" he asked in a loud and cheery voice. "Order anything you like." He was hardly relieved, when Adolph came, to find that they only wanted two beers and a high ball, and, though he ordered beer himself, he would have preferred to have purchased champagne upon this gala occasion.

"We want a good, honest German-American, one who is a good business man, and can make easy friends with everybody, to buy for us, very quietly, some valuable property owned by a number of Germans," explained Bendix concisely.

Carl considered that proposition with deep gravity.

"Well, I'm not workin' steady," he informed them, feeling much flattered.

"Oh, you wouldn't do," Bendix hastily informed him. "You're—you're too young."

"There's money to handle," interpolated Sledge shortly.

Carl took this comment upon his trustworthiness with no trace of offense.

"Then what you want is my old man," he announced, with positive conviction.

It was appalling to see Ben Sledge smile. It was like chiseling the grin of a clown upon the face of Zeus, and yet he did it, looking into the eyes of Bendix and answering the sudden gleam of humor. And yet:

"The very man," he said.

"The only man," agreed Bendix. "Solid and substantial in a business way, and a winner with the Germans. It's a wonder we hadn't thought of him before. Send him in, Carl."

IV.

The Sausage Widow swept majestically into the office of the Schneeganz Pork Packing Company, entirely surrounded by a stiffly crackling black silk gown, into which she inserted herself immediately before breakfast every morning, and, after removing her jet-trimmed black bonnet and cloak, she sat upon a high stool at the long desk, where she looped a heavy gold chain on and off her forefinger.

She was a person of property and influence, and she did not care who knew it. Also she was most comely for her years. Fewer people acknowledged this, but those who did—none of them, strangely enough, as well-to-do as herself—told her so repeatedly. Her first action upon this occasion was to inspect the previous day's orders, shipments, receipts, and expenditures, and to gaze gloomily for a moment in the direction of the books. Her next was to ask:

"Vhere is Chrristt?"

Old Heinrich Lodmueller, who had kept books for the big pork-packing concern ever since it had consisted of one hand-power sausage machine, and whose scalp was so red that it made his sparse gray hair look pink, turned with a prodigious wink to his young assistant, Barney Nixmeister, whose third grandchild was now at the hoop-rolling age, and asked:

"Vhere ist Chrrisst? By the barrel-schteaming machine?"

Heinrich's response to this was a mere grin, which revealed all his dental vacancies.

The Sausage Widow shielded the smiling blush upon her round face with one plump and well-ringed hand.

"Ach! I don't mean it Chrristt Krauss, *aber* Herr Chrristt," she half giggled.

"So-o-o? Excuse me," was the prodigiously playful retort of Heinrich. "Augoost, go by Herr Business Manager Chrristt-yann Schmitt, and say that Frrau Schneeganz should see him."

Then rose up the office boy, August Koenigzelus, his gray beard wagging with kindly laughter, and started for the door of the factory. Upon this came the final and most stupendous joke of all.

"Augoost!" Heinrich called. "The Frrau Schneeganz will be waiting—by the prrivate office."

"*Ach,* such foolishness!" the Widow Schneeganz cried, and, slipping from her stool upon a flooring which had good need to be stout, tripped straight away from there, with quite visibly alternating steps; but she ran straight into the private office!

Then came the Herr Business Manager Christian Schmitt, a procession in himself, who, walking with great dignity far behind his well-rounded middle, held the gold handle of his ebony cane still ahead of that, and, pointing its ferrule rigidly backward, cracked it upon the floor near his feet with staccato emphasis.

There was nothing in the world so shiny as Herr Schmitt's silk hat, so curly as his silken white hair, so transparently pink as his complexion, so perfect as the upward sweep of his white mustache, so immaculately snowy as his linen, and his cravat, and his waistcoat.

His black frock coat was as flawlessly creaseless as his gray trousers were flawlessly creased, and his boots might have been patent leather from the height of their polish.

Thus attired, and conscious that he was a conqueror, Herr Schmitt, before whose pomp all levity must cease, paraded, as if music were preceding him, into the private office, and stood at attention so that he might be beheld.

"You vish to see me, Kadtie?" he graciously inquired, in deep, deep chest tones which had been the pride of Sängerbunds and Männerchors in two worlds.

"Allvayss I vant to see you, Chrristt. *Ach, Gott,* how ni-i-ice!" and the smitten widow could no more have kept down her adoring hands than she could have closed her adoring eyes.

"I am so happy that you loaff me," he calmly stated in reply. "You may kiss me, Kadtie."

As if drawn by the fatal fascination which brings a fluttering little bird into the maw of the serpent, Katie approached him, with palms extended ready to place upon the beautiful, shiny, satin lapels of his coat, then suddenly closed her eyes and threw herself against him, and delivered a kiss which could be heard to the shipping doors.

Then the reaction. Stepping back and wringing her hands, the widow quavered:

"*Ach,* Chrristt, such a sinful woman vhat I am!"

Kindly, handsome Christian Schmitt comforted her with a pat, which smacked upon her broad shoulder.

"Neffer mind, Kadtie," soothed the oboe voice, "my vife does not blame you; she knowss you cannot help it."

The widow's rose-and-cream complexion changed to a solid color.

"Sophie Schmitt iss a fool!" she snapped. "Poor like your family iss, and she won't take the house and lot and the goodt interest building loan schtock you offered that I vould give her!"

"She iss a voman," he returned, with a splendid appearance of resignation. "Vith a voman I can do nothing vhen she iss a voman. Besides, Kadtie, remember she loaffs me, too," and he smoothed his inflexibly smooth mustache with marvelous complacency.

"I go to see her myself," she sud-

denly declared, and by the flash in her eye the experienced lady-killer knew when to stop.

"She iss not at home to-day," he explained, with apparent regret; "but tomorrow, go. I vish it." But he made up his mind to be sure to have his wife away from home the next day.

"I vish it also," she retorted; "for, belieff me, I shall not haff such loneliness all my life. Vilhelm Von Burgholz courts me at my home efery afternoon."

Herr Schmitt laughed his deep baritone laugh, and filled it full of great scorn.

"Burgholz!" he ejaculated.

"He iss a Von," the widow solemnly protested.

"That makes nothing in this country," retorted Christian. "All you get iss a skinny little runt of a pants presser with a bald head and a shiny coat. Kadtie, I get mad in a minute, and I tell you to go to take your Von."

"No! Chrristt! Come back!" she cried in a panic, as he turned toward the door. "Vait once. Ve don't talk about that any more. Ve talk business a while."

He seemed to have scarcely more relish for that, but he sat down, nevertheless, and prepared to defend himself.

"I vent over the books again yesterday," she began, now very briskly. "I think Lodmueller iss almost yet too oldt. Maybe I pension him off, yes, and giff Barney Nixmeister the job. I ask Klein yesterday why he don't pay his bill, and he says he pays it a month ago, and showss me the receipt yet vhat you gave him; and it ain't on the books. I saw it."

"So-o-o!" exclaimed Schmitt, in well-feigned surprise. "Leave me that, and I look through it."

"Yet more," went on the widow, to his great discomfort; but what more there was to be told he was not to know at that moment, for the office boy, having knocked discreetly, followed his grizzled beard into the room to announce no less a caller than Wilhelm Von Burgholz!

Sudden determination flashed upon the Sausage Widow.

"I see him right now; here," she stated with a defiant glance at her manager.

"I stay," declared Herr Schmitt, with much dignity.

The caller came into the presence of the wealthy pork packeress and her important manager with a deference entirely befitting his needy appearance and his humble station in life. He held his weather-grimed slouch hat turned nicely back upon his forearm, and, with his heels cracked together, bowed profoundly to both exalted personages. Herr Schmitt answered his bow with a bare jerk of the head, and became at once carelessly interested in the Christmas number of the *Pork and Lard Journal.*

"I hope I findd you well this morning, Fr-r-r-rau Schneeganz and Herr-r-r Schmidd," he began obsequiously.

"So-so," replied the widow, with a frown, for Burgholz was committing a foolishness which humiliated her, in bringing his wrinkled and unbrushed self into comparison with the resplendent Schmitt.

Herr Schmitt's only reply to the good wishes of Burgholz was a faint rumble deep in his throat as he indifferently turned from the green-and-red holly-wreathed advertisement of a patent paper lard pail, to a pink Santa Claus bearing in his arms the delectable present of a cute little electric sausage stuffer.

"I have a ledder from the Von this morning," resumed Burgholz, with tenacious hopefulness, addressing himself exclusively to the widow this time.

"So-o-o?" returned the widow, with polite interest. "He liffs yet, your coussin Otto, not?"

"He believes he will die soon."

"*Ach,* he neffer diess! Six timess already he promised it. No, Vilhelm, you be the Von vhen you are dead. Before, not," and the widow looped and unlooped her gold chain in impatient contempt.

"You think it?" he despondently inquired.

Herr Schmitt laughed from just beneath the third button of his waistcoat, and, bowing his careless adieus, departed with all the effect of a recessional. Herr Von Burgholz looked after him, hurt, but not resentful; Herr Schmitt was a man of power and influence.

"We missed you lasd nighd at the Knighds and Ladies of Wa-a-aldpurgis. They did me the high honor-r-r to mage me king."

"I concratulate you," she was polite enough to say.

"I thangk you," he answered, with a pleased smile. "Almost you were elecded the queen. You should have been there. You needed only one more vode."

"I care for such foolishness, nothing," she hastily informed him, though with a pained expression. "Who got it?"

"Gretta Br-r-raulein," Wilhelm informed her, with a rapt gaze toward the ceiling as he remembered the inspiriting contest. "She loogked beaudiful in the new r-r-robes of purple and green and gold; and the new crown has diamonds, rubies, and emeralds in id, believe me, the size of a dollar."

The Widow Schneeganz turned upon him the stern and indignant eye of a business woman.

"Vilhelm Burgholz," she snapped, purposely omitting the "Von"; "before haff I said it, that here, in this place, iss for no lodge business."

She bent upon him such angry eyes that they seemed to gleam almost red; and poor, innocent Wilhelm uncomfortably pinched his hat around and around the brim.

"I thingk maybe I go home," he observed pathetically, after a painful silence.

"Oh, it iss no hurry," the widow perfunctorily stated. "Come some other time vonce more."

"Thangk you," returned Wilhelm, rising sadly. "I bid you good morning, Fr-r-rau Schneeganz;" and he took his crestfallen departure, dreading, in his genteel soul, that Schmitt, as he passed out, would gloat over him.

Herr Schmitt, however, did not notice Wilhelm, for he had troubles of his own. It was impertinent of the Sausage Widow, to say the least, to compare the books and collections of the concern, especially when they were bound to show a discrepancy of seven or eight thousand dollars.

If he was not careful, she would have the impudence, by and by, to charge him with having appropriated the money. She might even go so far as to find out that he had.

Moreover, the postman had just then brought him a letter in a blue-tinted envelope, addressed in a dainty hand. He had picked up the letter with a frown, but read it with a smile, after which he became deeply thoughtful. Alas, he had gone the way of all flesh! After having permitted himself to be adored since youth, he had now permitted himself to adore; and he was a man of expensive tastes.

He took down old Lodmueller's ledger, and was poring over it in troubled perplexity when the widow came out of her office and edged up close to him, resting the flat of her arm against his own, and bending knit brows upon the columns. He held up a warning finger, closed the ledger, and drew her away, back into the private office.

"P-s-s-s-st!" he warned her, in his deepest and most sibilantly mysterious tones. "You should not go on the books any more. Old Lodmueller maybe might know it that ve are finding him out; then ve don't catch him."

"So-o-o!" exclaimed the widow, in wide-eyed admiration of his smartness. "I see it."

Once more the office boy creaked his rheumatic joints into the room, to announce a caller; this time the son of the Sausage Widow's manager.

"Iss Carl?" exclaimed Herr Schmitt in surprise, for it had been made known to Carl that his absence was never sincerely regretted at the factory. "Vell, he should come in."

Carl paid his respects to the widow before he talked to his father, sweep-

ing her completely from her feet, figuratively only, it must be understood, by his gay and friendly manner. She disapproved very much of Carl whenever she thought of him, but when he was there she liked him.

"Vell, Carl?" inquired Herr Schmitt, in the especial tone of sternness which he reserved for his family.

"I've just been with Ben Sledge, father," stated Carl, with a sudden stiffening of pride, which was an absurd caricature of Herr Christian's.

"He iss bad company," declared Herr Schmitt, with a righteous stand against all evil.

"But wait. He wants to see you."

"Me? By grafters haff I nothing to do. Vhat he vants with me?"

"Wants to hand you some money," explained the son; and then adroitly: "You see, father, there's a bunch of Germans own a piece of property Sledge has his eye on, and he wants a good, honest German-American, one who is a good business man, and can make easy friends with everybody, to buy it up for him."

Herr Christian Schmitt withstood that shock wonderfully well. He spent a full two minutes in deep, deep cogitation; then he squared his already square shoulders, and stiffened his already stiff neck, and protruded his already protruding chest.

"Tell him I come," he directed. Then, turning to the widow impressively: "You see it? Vhen they should haff a good, honest German-American, who iss a good business man and can make easy friends vith eferybody, who do they send for? Me!"

V.

It required a vast army of good, willing, shoulder-pushing patriots to enable the kind State to present the Summit Pike to the people, and, patriotic though they were, every warrior in the army—from State Senator Daniel B. Driver, the chief whip cracker for Sledge at the capitol, to Carl Schmitt, a mere stirrup holder—according to his rank, expected a soldier's pay.

One might imagine these willing workers in a long, winding procession, headed by Sledge himself, followed by Driver and his cohorts in the Senate, Buckley at the head of his legions from the Assembly, Cap Digglesby with his strong anti-Sledge forces, the officials of the three counties through which passed the Summit Pike, and all their serried ranks, the whole followed by the disorderly rabble of those who fetched and carried and went between, who "hung on" and "butted in" and "stuck around"; one might imagine all these earnest servants of the common weal, fanned into a fury of fanaticism for the public good, pushing and groaning and perspiring to wrest the Summit Pike from its iniquitous owners and present it, tied with pink ribbons and rosette bows upon a silver platter, to their grateful masters, the sovereign people.

One might even imagine this consecrated army, a force of not less than two hundred and fifty regulars, tried and true, doing it all for duty, and perhaps for glory; but Sledge, with a far clearer vision, saw this vast procession, before and during and after the battle, pausing at the public crib long enough for each yeoman to reward himself according to the size of his fist and the number of pockets he was allowed to have in his garments; and Sledge was content to have it so, for he was not one to muzzle the ox which trod the corn.

His first step, naturally, was to call in County Commissioner Jimmy Hegeman, a round-faced friend of the people, who carried cigars in both pockets, played every game under the sun with skill enough to command respect, but tact enough to lose more often than he won; and who was personally popular enough to be nominated on both tickets every year.

Sledge greeted him with an absence of repulsion which meant positive cordiality.

"Little water, hunh?" guessed Sledge, as he rang for Adolph.

"Vichy," replied Hegeman. "I'll have to drink a gallon of beer this aft-

ernoon. I won't be able to duck an ounce of it. What's doing, chief?"

"Nothin' much," responded Sledge, looking out of the unwashed window at the broken ash barrel in the dingy little court. "The Summit Pike's a damn nuisance, ain't it, Jimmy?"

Hegeman laughed, and lit one of his own cigars.

"Still got it in for old Schmolling?" he inquired.

"Do I ever change?" asked Sledge in return.

"No," admitted Jimmy; "I've known you, though, to shut a man off from the barrel for two years just to reduce the swelling in his noddle, and then give him a bigger hose than ever."

"That don't go with Schmolling," stated Sledge. "He's running an independent graft."

Jimmy nodded in comprehension. If there was a political culprit who was sure to go to his execution without a word of reprieve, it was the man who tried to run an independent graft, a system of stealing for private gain alone. Politics could not be run that way. Why, cities, counties, States, nor nations could be run that way—profitably.

"I've always thought Schmolling was too strong in his work," agreed Jimmy. "What's to be handed him?"

"Assessments," rumbled Sledge.

Jimmy lifted his eyes in surprise.

"Campaign?" he asked, and frowned doubtfully.

"No; improvements," corrected Sledge, with a quick decisiveness which would have been impatience in a less phlegmatic man.

"I see," returned Jimmy, grinning. "The roadway must be put in a perfect condition. It's in such a rotten state that the improvements will amount to about fifty cents on the dollar of the value of the stock." He paused and sighed. "There won't be much chance for a tear-off on that work."

"Not a cent," agreed Sledge. "I want it done quick."

Jimmy reflectively brushed the ashes from his cigar. "No rake-off, eh?" It wasn't like Sledge to do things for revenge alone. He always combined profit with pleasure. By virtue of the comparative independence which popularity gave him, he asked the question which few men would have dared to put to the Big Boy.

"What's the game?" he calmly inquired.

For the first time in their interview, Sledge turned upon his henchman his somber eyes in their puff-lidded slits. There was no gleam of expression in them, nor in the heavy-jowled face, and yet, under the cold influence of those depthless eyes, even the comfortable Jimmy Hegeman felt a something akin, physically, to a raw dampness upon him, as if a distant window had suddenly been opened to the cold rain.

The momentary gleam was his only answer, and Jimmy knew better than to pursue that topic any further. Still mindful of his own interests, however, he went on with the next step toward his purpose.

"The boys will be wanting to know something about their end of it," he suggested, after long and careful thought.

"They'll get theirs." Sledge was once more gazing heavily out of the window.

"Yes, I know," persisted Hegeman, still speaking slowly and choosing his words most carefully; "but they can't seem to understand that the last thing they put through for you, the C. G. and P. right of way, you know, was a losing deal; and some of the boys are dissatisfied."

"Gi' me their names," observed Sledge very quietly.

"I'll tell them that, and they'll be satisfied," laughed Hegeman, rising and still at ease, knowing that he personally was held blameless. "I'll drop everything else and get busy among the boys. We'll get this through for you at the next meeting."

"Tuesday night, eh?" grunted Sledge, still looking out of the window.

Tom Bendix, by phone, brought in, from the two adjoining counties, the proper heads of departments; one, an attorney, who found it more advan-

tageous to "stay out of politics" than to hold office, and the other, the mayor of his county seat; and Sledge found them most satisfactory people with whom to converse.

Herr Christian Schmitt was a far different proposition. Before a definite time was set for his interview with Sledge, his record was thoroughly investigated. He had been business manager for the Schneeganz Pork Packing Company for many years; he was free from debt, and had no bad habits —or, at any rate, none which these investigators deemed a blemish upon his character.

His business associates and his landlord all spoke highly of his probity, and the Widow Schneeganz, when appealed to, fell just short of hysterics in describing his trustworthiness, ability, and personal attractiveness.

"He's a joke to me," pronounced Bendix; "but these Germans will fall for him so quick you won't remember where they stood; and he's too big a mutt-head to be crooked."

"They've got to be awful mutts to be that safe," declared Sledge, with a conviction born of experience with the wrong sort of men exclusively; "but he's the man, all right. Get him in."

When he came, however, it was Bendix who did all the explaining, after Sledge had acknowledged the introduction with such cordiality of which he was capable, or of which he was willing to stand convicted.

"You haff sent for me by my son Carl, I belieff it," he stated to Sledge immediately after the introduction, speaking with severe dignity, and glancing about the dingy little back room with fastidious distaste.

"Mr. Sledge wants to give you the first chance at a good business opportunity," Bendix informed him, suppressing a smile.

"I thank you," returned Herr Schmitt, folding his hands upon his gold-headed cane and bowing gratefully toward Sledge, who sat impassively looking out upon the sway-backed rear porch of the adjoining building.

"You have heard of the Summit Pike?" asked Bendix tentatively.

"I haff drove over it. It iss a' outrage!" and Herr Schmitt stiffened with indignant remembrance. "Bumps and bumps and bumps, and puddles and puddles and puddles, and deep ditches vhat twist a vheel off. Vonse it costet me six dollars and forty-five cents. To who shall I bring the bill?" and he looked toward the absent Sledge with reminiscent anger. Immediately remembering, he bowed politely.

"I'm glad you think about it as we do," returned Bendix, without a smile. "Mr. Sledge has some friends who wish to buy up the entire Summit Pike, put it in good repair, and run it, at a reasonable profit to which any business is entitled, for the benefit of the people. He is afraid that, if his friends attempt to buy it in their own names, the public might think there was some political deal connected with it, and the owners of the pike would raise the price beyond what the property is worth. You see that, don't you?"

"Sure I see it," acknowledged Herr Schmitt, laughing in most friendly fashion toward the immovable Sledge, who still looked gloomily out of the window.

"Of course you do," went on Bendix approvingly. "Now, what Mr. Sledge wants is a good, honest German-American, not in politics, one who is a fine business man, and can make easy friends with everybody, and he wants to make that man president of the German-American Turnpike Company, with nearly half a million dollars' worth of stock in his own name."

Herr Christian Schmitt choked dangerously, but did not fall off his chair.

"I thank you," he finally stammered in the direction of the unresponsive Sledge.

"Of course," Mr. Bendix now carefully explained, "you will not actually own the stock."

"No-o-o; sure not," agreed Mr. Schmitt reluctantly.

"The money to finance the project will all be furnished by Mr. Sledge's friends. You will vote the stock and

transact the business of the company as directed. Aside from that, your business will be to help organize the company, and purchase the stock of the present corporation from the German farmers who own it. That is the reason we must have a good, honest German-American, who is a fine business man and can make easy friends with everybody."

Herr Schmitt smoothed his plastered white mustache complacently.

"I am the description," he said, with complete conviction.

"That is why we sent for you," returned Bendix. "There will be excellent pay in it for you, Mr. Schmitt; ten per cent. of all you pay out for the property, with a good bonus if you buy it under a certain figure. Of course, all this is in confidence, Mr. Schmitt, and nothing must be said until we are ready to have it known."

"Ten per cent.," figured Mr. Schmitt thoughtfully.

"Ten per cent.," repeated Bendix, with an air of complete happiness over Mr. Schmitt's good fortune. "It should amount to not less than seven or eight thousand dollars. In fact, if you deliver the goods, we'll guarantee you that much, besides your salary as president; and you needn't give up your present business for it, either. Just take two or three weeks' vacation, and wind it right up."

Seven or eight thousand dollars! That was about the amount of Mr. Schmitt's little discrepancy in the packing company's books.

"I do it," he announced.

Mr. Sledge had been as deaf, apparently, as a consignment of putty, but immediately upon Mr. Schmitt's decision, he rang the bell for Adolph, and, when that dapper little functionary appeared, ordered:

"Send in Billy Sothern."

Mr. Schmitt looked from one to the other of his companions in perplexity, but neither of them offering any explanation, he, also, waited until the entrance of Billy Sothern, a whisky-faced man, who was a hanger on, a lawyer, but looked more like a horse doctor.

Mr. Sothern, upon being introduced to Mr. Schmitt, immediately produced a lengthy typewritten document, which he slammed upon the liquor-ringed table in front of the president of the future German-American Turnpike Company.

"Sign there," he directed, making the location on the paper exactly definite by a splendidly grained finger mark.

With a sigh, the three habitués of the back room went into a convenient state of coma, while Herr Christian Schmitt read and reread the agreement offered him.

Having thoroughly and finally convinced himself that he did not understand it and never would, he signed it "there," and departed in alternate states of elation and wonderment.

After all, the document to which he had put his name was but a simple thing, admitting that the stock he was to hold in the company under discussion was his in trust only, either it or its equivalent in market value cash to be surrendered on demand. Inasmuch as they gave him no copy of the agreement, Herr Schmitt, wherever he is, is probably puzzled, to this day, to know what he signed; but it made no real difference in the end.

VI.

Assemblyman Bailey Cooper, preparing for a week-end visit at home, read with avidity and many other emotions, all pleasurable, that the Summit Pike was to be made into a good, sound road, which would be a credit to the city of his birth and the county he represented; and he gave to Cassidy, of the *Courier,* a lengthy and triumphant interview upon how his ringing speech upon the Canal bill had brought about this much-needed and richly deserved public blessing.

Cassidy put that interview on the wire.

What Bailey read, as he rode from the train to his home in a street car the next morning, was a front-page edi-

torial pointing out that the improvement of the Summit Pike was a reform due entirely to the unwearying efforts of the *Courier*.

Bailey, having recently brooded somewhat upon the subject, was now thoroughly convinced of the innate injustice of all human affairs, particularly those political.

The *Courier* had fought for this movement, against the notorious Sledge gang, in season and out of season, and to prove it, it reprinted, in very black type, its drastic comments upon this topic from its files of previous years.

Bailey Cooper, for the first time in his life, felt sympathy for the man who was tempted to curse God and die. For comfort he turned to the *Blade*, and found in an equally black-type spotted editorial that the Summit Pike improvement was one which had been long contemplated by the progressive and liberal party it represented, and, after giving due credit to the *Blade* for having always supported the contemplated boon, called attention to the fact that the majority of the officials in power who had voted for the stupendous assessments necessary were men who had been dubbed by the opposition, as a term of reproach, "the friends of Sledge."

Nowhere, even here, was there a mention of the able and earnest young assemblyman from Ring County; all of which was highly discouraging to a man in the public eye who subscribed to three clipping bureaus, and could carry all the clippings in his pocketbook.

There being no other human recourse for this contemptible degeneracy of humanity, Bailey Cooper went home and told it all to his mother, who made him some genuine, for-sure corn cakes for his breakfast, and compelled him to take a gargle for his precious throat, which was a trifle husky, and removed a cinder from his eye; all of which reconciled him, in some small degree, to continuing to inhabit this vain world; particularly since Margaret Holtzman, whom he called up immediately after breakfast, declared, with real pleasure in her voice, that she would be glad to see him that night.

He spent the day waiting for the night. Of course, in the meantime, he saw such of his party leaders as were not too busy, and was compelled to wait his long, long turn, like a messenger boy, in the office of Mike Feeny, the eminent contractor politician, who led the anti-Sledge forces gloriously on to their annual defeat.

How such things could happen to a State assemblyman, Bailey was painfully unable to explain, nor could he understand why Feeney, after a bare trifle of coldly polite persiflage, should hastily turn him out in favor of a bullet-headed saloon keeper, who wanted the arc light in front of his place moved up to the corner of the block. To the young the world wags zigzag.

He fastened eventually upon two ward politicians, who, in his campaign, had shouted well when told, and dragged them to dinner with him, in a place of their own selection, where everything began, and continued, and ended with drinks; but as they both talked politics and would neither one listen to statesmanship, he was in a dreary frame of mind, and much in need of more comfort when he reached the parlor of the Holtzmans'—where he found Carl Schmitt!

"Why, Bailey, how thin you've grown!" exclaimed Margaret upon his entrance, so genuinely concerned that she forgot every other form of greeting.

Bailey flushed. He had been performing the disgraceful feat of living within his legitimate legislative income, and, out of it, sending home money to his mother, a proceeding which fosters no gout.

"Yes, I've been working pretty hard," he admitted. "Hello, Carl. Margaret, I never saw you so charming," and he stood off to survey her, with a pang of jealousy that Schmitt should have preceded him there to feast his eyes upon her in this pretty, new, pink chiffon.

"You've learned to say nice things since you went to the legislature," she

replied, nevertheless flushing with pleasure at the compliment.

"No, earnest things," he insisted, anxious to have some one believe that he still believed in himself. "I suppose you have read of the result of my speech on the Canal bill?"

"Oh, are they going to do something with the canal?" she inquired, ashamed to confess her ignorance, but bound to be candid, especially with Bailey; something or other within him seemed to demand it.

Job only had boils; Bailey commended himself for his patience under more aggravating conditions. Was it possible that Margaret, she whom of all the world he had most desired to impress, did not know what the Canal bill was about after reading his speech, or that she did not know the results of his terrific arraignment of the Summit Pike? Well, let him not be too proud to explain!

"You know, in my speech I mentioned the Summit Pike," he reminded her, with a forgiving smile.

"Oh, yes, they're going to repair th pike," she brightly informed him, glad to have a topic with which she was thoroughly conversant. "That's the biggest news since you left home. Had you heard of it?"

"He couldn't well help it, for there's nothing else in the papers," interpolated Carl. "You know I told you at the time that he took a whack at it in his speech, Margaret. You happened to fall right in line with what was doing that time, Bailey. Who put you next?"

"Put me next?" repeated Bailey, who despised slang, and who, even as he spoke, was chiding himself mercilessly for having caught up the phrase. "Why, in my Canal bill speech I *inaugurated* the movement. I *forced* it upon the attention of the public. I *compelled* the officials of the various counties interested to take action in the matter."

Margaret, sitting back now upon her piano bench, was looking up at him with glistening eyes. Seen in vigorous earnest, he was good to look at. He inspired, too, a feeling of confidence. He had fine eyes.

"I am glad to see that my small efforts should have already borne fruit," went on Bailey, warming up to his work; "but this is only the beginning. The State is an Augean stable through which only the first little trickling rivulet of public force has just begun to penetrate."

"How I would love to hear you make a speech in the legislature!" said Margaret enthusiastically. "The rapt, attentive faces, the forward-bent, eagerly listening forms, the deafening applause —— Oh, I can see it all! It must be simply grand!"

"Well, no, it isn't exactly like that," confessed Bailey, with a saddening remembrance of the empty desks and the reading speaker and the gambling pages and the handful of letter-writing members. Also, he remembered that the only deafening applause had been the gavel of the speaker calling him to order at the end of his fleet-winged fifteen minutes.

Carl Schmitt laughed boisterously.

"I should say it ain't like that," he agreed. "I've been up in the visitors' gallery at the legislature when they were letting the boy orators have their first work-out, and you couldn't coax a regular assemblyman inside the chamber with a real dollar bill. Bailey knows the game. They have to tame down the young ones before they're of any use to the party, because the average cub politician thinks he's running the United States when he's lucky enough to get into the State legislature;" and Carl, enjoying himself hugely in Bailey's discomfiture, reached over to clap him on the back in hearty friendliness, while he took another good laugh.

Margaret turned to Carl with flashing eyes.

"Some people, who would like to, *never* get to the legislature," she observed; and the laugh flickered out.

The imminent hostilities were interrupted by the arrival of Mr. Holtzman, who, notwithstanding a certain personal liking for Bailey which he explained to himself upon the grounds of mere rep-

rehensible sentiment, since there was no practical reason for it, announced himself as pleased to see young Cooper back again, but treated him very coolly, nevertheless, for a reason which was presently apparent.

"Well, I see you've been stirring up a muss already," he remarked, as soon as he had taken his seat after shaking hands.

"How is that?" asked Bailey, with a gleam of hope.

"You started all this trouble about the pike road," Holtzman charged.

"Thank you," replied Bailey gratefully. "You are the first man who has given me credit for bringing Sledge to his knees in this manner."

"It isn't credit; it's cash," retorted Holtzman. "Think of the poor farmers that built that road that have to go down in their pockets for hundreds of thousands of dollars to build it again, for the public to drive over."

"The public has paid for it scores of times," Bailey promptly returned.

"Well, they should pay," insisted Holtzman, quick in defense of legitimate investment.

"But they are entitled to a good road. They should have what they paid for," Bailey persisted, in spite of Margaret's warning glance that he was nearing the danger line. "If a man buys a loaf of bread at your shop, and brings it back, and says it is no good, what do you do?"

"I don't believe him," asserted Holtzman hotly, secure in the knowledge of the quality of his own goods. "No, Bailey, you're a nice, young boy, and you mean well, but you get yourself in bad when you start any monkey business with a man like Mr. Sledge. He knows what he's doing, I tell you. He knew the pike road needed fixing long ago, but he had a good reason for not doing it until he was ready. Now maybe you've made him do it before. Mr. Sledge has done more good for this town than all the reformers in the world."

"I give up," acknowledged Bailey hopelessly, unable to put Cooper logic against Holtzman argument, and his tone was so despondent that the motherly part of Margaret longed to do something immediately for him, equivalent to baking him hot corn cakes, or making him gargle his throat, or picking a cinder from his eye.

In the dead quiet which ensued, Carl turned confidentially to Holtzman.

"I'd like to talk to you on a little business matter," he observed.

Holtzman, glancing at Carl's flashy clothing, hesitated a moment.

"All right," he said reluctantly, and led the way into the little room under the stairway, which Margaret, with her "newfangled, American notions," insisted upon calling the library.

First of all he gave Carl a cigar, and produced a bottle and two glasses from beneath the ancient history section of the shelving.

"This is a bad time to talk business," he said, "because business has been so rotten. Well, what is it, Carl?"

"We were just talking of the Summit Pike," began young Schmitt. "My father is getting up a company to buy and operate it."

"Your father?" echoed Holtzman, in surprise. "I didn't know he had any money. He don't even own his own property."

"There is plenty of money back of him," asserted Carl, with a confidence which carried weight.

"Well, I guess your father could get money back of him for a good-paying investment," acknowledged Holtzman, considering the matter carefully. "He's always been honest, as far as anybody knows, for what chances he's had. He spends an awful lot of money, though," and he glanced again with disapproval at young Schmitt's costly raiment.

"That's what gets him this chance," returned Carl triumphantly. "It takes a good dresser to do big business."

"Well, if it's slick business," admitted Holtzman. "Does your father want me to go in back of him, too?"

"No, indeed," denied Carl, again triumphantly. "The company is to be half a million dollars, and he is to hold ninety-five per cent. of the stock. It's to be called the German-American Turnpike

Company, and he wants a few good German-Americans to take up the other five per cent., just to help it along, you know. He wants twenty-five of them to take ten shares each, or one thousand dollars' worth of the stock, and father thought that maybe I could get you to be one of the twenty-five."

"A thousand dollars is a thousand dollars. You don't pick it up every day in the street," stated Holtzman seriously. "Anyhow, your father never made any money for himself."

"This is his chance," persisted Carl, who had been promised a commission. He paused to listen anxiously. The constant hum of low voices, speaking indistinguishable words in the parlor, annoyed him so much that he did not hear what Holtzman replied.

"Anyhow," Holtzman was still arguing when Carl once more caught the thread, "nobody knows if it's a good investment or not. It's going to cost a lot of money to buy that pike road, and a lot of money to build it over again, and it all depends on the management, and your father never made any money for himself."

Carl's face brightened. The piano in the parlor began to tinkle out the plaintive strains of Schubert's "Serenade," and, while that was a dangerous air, it was not half so dangerous as low-voiced conversation.

"Let me tell you something," he said, driven to his last ditch. "Of course, he doesn't want it known, but Sledge is behind this."

"Is he!" ejaculated Holtzman, sitting straight up in his chair.

"Sledge is behind this," Carl solemnly assured him, emphasizing each syllable, as he spoke it, with taps of his middle finger upon Holtzman's knee. "His money is in it, and he wants it to go through."

"Why didn't you say so?" demanded Holtzman. "Of course, I'll take the stock. Does Mr. Sledge want my check right away?" and he started over to the desk.

"No, no," said Carl, though regretfully, for he would have liked to carry a check for that much to anybody. "The business will all be done through father, anyhow, and the check will be made payable to him."

"All right," agreed Holtzman cheerfully. "He can have it any time. So, it's all settled," and he rose.

"Just a minute," insisted Carl. "You understand that Sledge is under cover with this. You can see him, and find out about it if you want to, but his name must never be mentioned."

"Sure, I understand that," Holtzman returned, with a forward wave of his upright palm, which indicated that Carl should set his mind at ease about everything. "I got to go back to the parlor now. We got company, you know, and maybe mamma isn't down yet."

Mamma was down, however, when they returned to the parlor, dressed in her black silk, and wearing her one-fourth carat diamond engagement ring, her gold locket with the half-carat diamond, which papa gave her upon their first wedding anniversary; her one-carat brooch, which he gave her when Margaret was born; her carat-and-a-half diamond earrings, which he gave her after they moved into the big catering shop, and in her hair the priceless sunburst, which had become hers immediately after the new house was paid for; also, she was beaming her beamingest upon Bailey, whom she liked very much without knowing why, or caring.

Margaret kept on playing for some little time after the business men reëntered the parlor, but since neither Carl nor her parents displayed any signs of going, she quit.

"I believe I was wrong," confessed the honest Holtzman to Bailey, breaking into the first silence. "I guess you did a good thing about that turnpike business. I see it different now."

Margaret flashed a look of gratitude toward Carl, who immediately absorbed the gratitude with pleasure, although he deplored its cause.

Bailey, however, caught the glance, and was grateful for her gratitude, though he was sorry Carl got it. He was further downcast that, since he had had his innings at the music, Carl now insisted upon his own syncopated fa-

vorites, and the mad, merry revel went on with nobody satisfied, until Papa Holtzman, looking at his watch, turned out the lights in the library and the back parlor, when both young men, knowing well the customs of the Holtzman household, took their departure together.

As there is very little for a statesman and a politician to talk about, and nothing at all for lovers of the same girl to discuss, they walked, in intense silence, down to the corner, where, with mutual relief, they took cars in opposite directions.

The next day Bailey Cooper went back to his task of saving the country, but was not quite convinced that it was worth while.

VII.

Upon the day that Herr Christian Schmitt received a troublesome bill for a jeweled vanity box, Wilhelm Von Burgholz was ushered into the private office of the Schneeganz Pork Packing Company, where the Sausage Widow and her manager were discussing the long-pending matter of the discrepancy. For once in his life, Herr Schmitt welcomed the interruption, but he was surprised to see Burgholz come into the room with shoulders so erect and step so elastic, and eyes so keen, and still more surprised that the caller paid so little attention to him.

"It gives me great habbiness to say that my cousin Otto, in Germany, is dead," the caller solemnly and almost haughtily informed the widow, paying no attention whatsoever to Herr Christian Schmitt.

"How ni-i-ice!" delightedly returned Frau Schneeganz. "Then that makes it that you are the Von."

"I am the Von," replied Von Burgholz, with modest but firm dignity; but still he did not glance in the direction of plain Schmitt.

There is a divinity that hedges about a king, rough hew him how we may, and even that living torchlight procession, Herr Christian Schmitt, felt its mystic influence pervading him so strongly that in the presence of mere but potent Vonship he surreptitiously removed the silk hat which he had worn in the presence of the lady, but mopped his brow, as if he had taken off the hat for that purpose.

The Sausage Widow put on her bonnet.

"How much did you said it that your cousin had debts?" she inquired, as she tied a bow into her chin.

"Only a hundred thousand marks," Von Burgholz answered, with growing cheerfulness.

"Twenty-five thousand dollars, heh?" computed the widow, walking across to a mirror, and studying most carefully the bow she had tied. "And how much property?"

"Two hundred acres and a twelve-room schloss," he concisely inventoried.

"How ni-i-ice!" commented the widow, throwing on her coat. "Of course, the roof leaks, and the plastering is half down, and the woodwork and everything else iss *schrecklich;* but a few more thousand dollars—— I am concratulating you, Herr Von Burgholz," and, fastening the frogs of her coat, she walked to the door.

"Will you be back soon, Kadtie?" asked Herr Schmitt, very humbly, indeed, for him.

"Not so quick if Frau Schmitt iss to home," she replied, with a snap of her jaws, as she stepped outside.

"I shall go pard way, if you please," offered Herr Wilhelm Von Burgholz. and, without any parting salutation whatever to Herr Schmitt, he followed the widow with a haughtiness which overshadowed his shabbiness, and walked away with her.

Herr Christian Schmitt arose in deep thought. It looked as if the parting of the ways had come for him. His crest was fallen, and his feathers drooped, and, before he opened the door to pass out into the office, he was compelled to stop behind the charitable cover of its ground glass and reacquire the majesty of his carriage and the stern set of his shoulders.

Once in the presence of his inferiors, however, he was himself again.

He passed out before the long-railed,

high desk with the usually lordly mien which, in all these years, had made Lodmueller and Nixmeister and the boy, August, believe him to be a marvelous business man, and hurried as fast as his imperial dignity would permit, to the Turnhalle Saloon, two blocks away, where they had a booth telephone. Here he called up the drug store opposite his home, and asked them to send immediately across the street for Mrs. Schmitt, chewing his patience to threads until, over the wire, he heard her meek, little voice.

"Sophie, listen what I tell you."

"Yah, Christyan," was the tremulous answer.

"Go back by the house and make the blinds and the doors locked."

"Yah, Christyan."

"You ain't in the house if anybody comes. Not anybody!"

"Yah, Christyan."

"Make not any noise, and pack you your clotheses till I come home. Tonight I send you on that vissit by our Lena in Springville."

"Yah, Christyan." The tremulous tone was happy now.

"And, Sophie, whoever it iss vhat comes, don't peep out."

"Yah, Christyan."

"And, Sophie," his own voice was softened, not so much in tenderness or pleading as in temerity.

"Ya-a-a-a-ah?" The meek, little voice at the other end of the wire had in it all the timid coaxing of a frightened pigeon.

"You vouldn't vant that house and lot and good building loan stocks vhat Frau Schneeganz vould be pleased to giff you?"

The telephone company almost had need to send out a repair crew on the bruised and sprained copper wire which carried that shrill, piercing, furious, wild-cat screech of:

"Nein!"

With a motion like an electric shock, Herr Christian Schmitt jerked the receiver in place, and then stood scratching his head in perplexity.

"She von't do it," he finally concluded.

Well, at any rate, he would have time to think, and if Frau Schneeganz were to have seen his wife, he would have had none. The widow was as good as married to her Von, that was plain to be seen; after that she would not need a business manager; Von Burgholz would put an expert accountant on the books, and all would be nothing.

He went back and shut himself in the private office, and thought, and thought, and thought, in saucer-eyed wonder at his own dilemma, until from somewhere entirely outside himself, he dragged in a brilliant idea.

Procuring a half-empty inkwell and a book of note blanks, he consulted some data in a little, red memorandum book, and made out notes covering the amounts of his various self-appropriations, beginning with the last one in good, black ink, and adding a little water as he went backward in the dates, until the first one of all looked very faded, indeed.

It was a clumsy enough job, as even he saw, but it would probably pass muster with the Sausage Widow, especially under emotional conditions.

He had entirely finished his preparations before the widow was due to return, and he waited impatiently. Three times, as he fancied he heard her footsteps outside, he threw himself vainly face forward upon the floor in groveling self-abasement.

Upon the fourth and right occasion, however, he ran a stray pin into his hand, and was up and damning it when the lady entered, but he stuck to his carefully thought out lines, nevertheless, not being able to evolve new ones for himself upon such short notice.

"I haff a confession to make by you, Kadtie," he said, with a half-gulped sob in his deep voice; and took a furtive suck at the pin hole in his palm.

The Sausage Widow slammed her cloak on a chair.

"Iss Sophie Schmitt effer to home?" she demanded.

She was not getting her cues properly, but Herr Schmitt made another brave effort.

"I haff betrayed my trust," he went on, repeating the half-swallowed sob.

"Vhen I had a frau vhat's out effery day, I put her avay anyhow. That's me!" the widow declared, and threw her jetted bonnet across to the desk.

"Vasn't Sophie to home?" the herr inquired meekly, deserting the dialogue which should have been so tragically sympathetic.

"Vhere iss she?" Frau Schneeganz snapped, turning upon him so suddenly that he almost revealed the deadly secret of his false upper teeth.

He was compelled to think deeply.

"That's so, by Cheminy!" he exclaimed, a sudden flood of memory pouring over him. "She vissits by our Lena in Springville."

"And you not know it!" she charged him in disgust. "Chrisstyan, you are a fool; Sophie Schmitt, she iss a fool; your son Carl, he iss a fool; I neffer know your Lena, but I bet you. Vhat iss it this confession?"

"Herr Gott!" popped out of the tortured Schmitt. All unprepared now, he was brought face to face with his nemesis. He had intended, after a display of soul-tearing emotion, to beat himself tragically upon the plaited bosom, and accuse himself heartbrokenly of being a thief; of having robbed her, his friend and benefactress, and more; and to then throw himself upon her mercy. Now all was nothing again.

"I haff lost you some money," he blurted.

"Vhat!" she shrieked. "How much iss it? Quick!"

"I schpeculated for you in—in pork."

"How much iss it? Quick!" and the widow sat down in order to breathe as fatly as she liked.

"I done it in a bucket shop vhich it iss against the law to name the name of the place."

"I said how much!" insisted the widow, beginning to fan herself violently with a blotter.

"But you should not lose. I schtand it myself," he stumbled on desperately. "Here. I haff made for you notes for efery cent!"

Without a word, the widow jerked the bundle of notes from his nerveless fingers, and, whirling to her desk, she leafed them over rapidly, setting down the amounts upon the back of an old envelope, thriftily brushing aside a pad of clean paper. She looked up with a sigh of relief after she had cast up the total.

"Gott sei dank!" she fervently exclaimed. "I belieffed it that you had lost the whole factory."

He clutched at this unexpected relief like a shivering tramp at a glass of whisky, and it restored his fast-waning dramatic instinct.

"I haff done all in my power," he said, with pathetic but manly resignation, standing once more stiffly erect, and holding his gold-headed cane again at its properly effective angle. "Now, Kadtie, I go, forever may be. I vish you, by your Von, great happiness."

"Aw-w-w, Chrrisstyan, vait vonce," she cooed, looking up at him almost in awe of his Chanticlerian magnificence. "Vhat good these notes iss to me I don't belieff it. You got nothing. But about the Von, we vait till I see Sophie Schmitt. You know, Chrrisstyan, that I should be a hochfrau vould giff me great happiness; *gr-r-eat* happiness! Vhen I vass a little girl in Chermany, we wass so poor that we had ragss; and when a *Von* came driving by with his fine lady, sitting up there so schtiff and peaudiful all in silk and diamonds, they didn't vatch out not to run over us. *Ve jumped! Ach,* vhat joy to be the rich frau of a Von!"

Herr Schmitt stood with bowed head, nodding thoughtfully. He, too, had been the child of very poor parents in the Vaterland. He had worked in the fields at five, and he, too, remembered the passage of the Von.

"But, Chrrisstyan, vhen I look up at you, so bi-i-ig, and ni-i-ice, I don't vant it."

Herr Schmitt remained in thought for a few moments, then he went over and took a seat close by the widow's desk.

"I got a scheme you can make back all the money I lost for you," he informed her.

"I had enough schemess," she replied, still smiling, however, and patting his hand. "Just the pork business, that's enough, Chrrisstyan."

"This iss a politics' scheme, though," he explained triumphantly, and he told her all about Sledge's Summit Pike project, so far as he had been permitted to understand it.

"Now, here iss vhat you do," he went on. "I haff to buy all this property for Mr. Sledch's friends. I tell you some of the easiest bargains; then you yourself buy them, then I pay you the best price I giffe any place; and you and me share up the profits."

"That's a schmart scheme," she admitted, with huge admiration for the man who had evolved it; "but it looks like it's crookedness, maybe, ain't it?"

"Vhen you are doing business against a politician, there iss no crookedness," he announced, voicing the popular conviction; and the widow, after thinking it over, agreed with him.

Before she left the office that day, she stopped at the bookkeeper's desk.

"Charge these notes against Herr Schmitt," she directed. "And, Lodmueller, I don't discharge you like I thought about, and I don't cut down your pay. You keep right on working, but you don't get that raise I promise you next January."

VIII.

It was easier for Cap Digglesby to hold an interview with Ben Sledge than for a camel to pass through the needle's eye, but not much; for Cap, as the rabid and vicious leader of the anti-Sledge forces in the house, had a reputation to sustain.

The faces of both were so familiar to the reading public, and both men were so well known personally, that to arrange a meeting in a small village was the handiest possible way to invite publicity and disaster.

Accordingly, Ben Sledge went straight to the capitol, for the business of presenting the Summit Pike as a free and gracious gift to the people, was now nearing its completion. The tail of the procession, contrary to the usual procedure, had long been in motion, and it was now time for the head to start wriggling.

So far, the process of making this handsome present to the merry populace had been very successful. The thrifty farmers who owned it had been scared, by threats of assessments, into selling it to the impressive and plausible Herr Schmitt at a ridiculously low figure.

The time had now come to sell it to the State, so that the State could turn it over to the waiting and eager citizens, and receive their thanks.

The legislative act for this was already in the hands of Buckley, but Sledge was not one to leave any important matter to the law of averages, nor to leave an important interview to an intermediary; and Cap Digglesby, as Sledge's chiefest public enemy, was important.

The manner of their meeting was very simple, after all. On the day of Sledge's visit to the capitol, Digglesby visited a friend in the Hotel Bannister. Sledge, stopping at quite a distant hotel, made a round of the most prominent cafés with some of his stanch, handy-drinking associates, where he would be publicly seen and recognized.

Among other places, the crowd visited the Hotel Bannister bar. There Sledge quietly slipped away, stepped into an elevator, and was whirled up to room seventy hundred and twenty-six, where, with no trace of surprise whatsoever, he found Cap Digglesby waiting for the absent friend.

"I got three minutes," said Sledge. "What can you do for the Summit Pike bill?"

Digglesby, fondling a wispy beard which should have been white, but was yellow, grinned peacefully.

"You can go right back home, chief. I got it all figured out," and, drawing over closer to the Big Boy, he explained his plan with keen enjoyment.

As he talked, Ben Sledge smiled; and there are men who have said that they had rather, so far as pleasantness of picture was concerned, see him furious

with anger, for his upper lip suddenly protruded and squared, carrying with it its projecting canopy of stubby gray mustache, displaying its scarlet, fat-ribbed, inner lining, and showing the huge, even, ocher-colored upper teeth, while the corners of his lips and the tip hairs of his mustache turned so sharply upward that they gave a ghastly caricature of a clownish effect to that part of his face.

In a lean man or an animal, the result would have been a snarl, except that the narrow eye apertures were closed and hidden, as if the low-hanging bluish pouches had finally carried out their threat, and had swelled upward, and blotted them out forever.

Even Digglesby, inured as he was to the remorseless revenges men's faces take upon their masters, was relieved when the smile faded, and Sledge, with a curt, "You'll do, Digg," arose and took his departure, regaining his crowd before he had hardly been missed.

That night Digglesby met Buckley, the gray-faced administration leader, upon the street, and told him the plan in a single sentence; and Buckley, with a word of thanks for the "tip," passed on, laughing all the way up the street.

The Summit Pike bill was one of those urgent measures for the public good which are put upon quick passage; and before the people, beloved of all patriots, had quite recovered from the shock of the boon which was to be thrust upon them, the bill was upon the floor of the Assembly, and Assemblyman Donovan was making a ringing speech in its favor.

"When will the State recognize her paternal duties to the people?" he demanded, in stentorian tones, in closing, with a side glance out of the corners of his eyes to see if Bailey Cooper remembered his own words of only a few weeks ago. "Too long has this sleeping and decrepit Commonwealth, forgetting in slothful slumber the glories of her beneficent past, permitted her moss-grown institutions to sap the resources of her stalwart and loyal citizenry! Too long has she permitted selfish private gain to feast upon the heart's blood of the public! Too long has she confused statesmanship with politics and politics with business! She must *awake!* I say, must AWAKE from this lethargy, and she must present, as a gift of gracious reparation to the people, the public utilities which, paid for by the people, should be as free as the precious, life-giving air! In the list of such utilities, I have in mind, first and foremost, the disgraceful and infamous Summit Pike, which, winding its fifteen miles of rutted, and bowldered, and puddled roadway through the richest section of Ring County, and connecting the wealthiest city in the State with its tributary sister communities, and kept in a more disreputable condition of no repair than any barnyard lane, has been paid for a hundred times over by the people, who have not got it yet! I call upon the State, in the name of the sovereign people whom I represent, to condemn, and purchase, and put in repair, and present to her grateful children what is now their chiefest eyesore, but will be their chiefest pride, the Summit Pike!"

There was more, much more, preceding this mere quotation from Bailey Cooper's aforetime empyrean flight, and it was all in enthusiastic support of the bill which called upon the State to condemn and purchase the Summit Pike at a cost "not to exceed" thirty thousand dollars per mile.

But the real fancy touch was Bailey Cooper's own, and Jim Donovan sat down flushed and breathless, while Bailey had the sorry comfort of hearing his golden words applauded, even though uttered by another.

Then up rose Bailey Cooper, pale but determined, to attack the bill, this being Cap Digglesby's hilarious plan to aid Sledge in the passing of it. Bailey had worried through a sleepless night; and, in fact, many sleepless nights. To begin with, though he longed until he ached for another opportunity to sway a legislative body which was in reality more immobile than a pyramid, he was seriously in favor of the bill, and had even advocated such a measure, as he was careful to point out to the wily, old diplomat.

Digglesby, however, had pointed out to him in return that it was not the Summit Pike condemnation bill which was to be attacked, but this particular Summit Pike purchase bill, which he was solemnly able to assure his young friend and talented supporter, was purely and simply a Sledge graft.

He had positive information that Sledge had bought up the pike for a song, and was Bailey Cooper the man to allow an enormous public theft like this, amounting to nearly half a million of dollars, to be the result of his own honest and sincere recommendation?

Bailey Cooper was not that man; by the tall heavens, no! So he had assured Cap Digglesby, in a voice trembling with indignation, and had added to such assurances his heartfelt gratitude at being permitted, by the leader of his party, to set himself right before the tribunal of his own conscience.

This had been comparatively easy, and it set him to work upon a furious speech which was highly interesting; but in the midst of this task had come an extremely friendly letter from Margaret Holtzman, advising him that her father was highly delighted with the outcome of Bailey's Summit Pike suggestion, in which outcome Mr. Holtzman had now a financial interest, and he thanked Bailey in advance for being about to support and vote for the bill, which, of course, he would do. Margaret, also, hoped that Bailey would make a speech for the bill, and vote for it, and compel it to pass, because it would be such a personal triumph for him.

This letter naturally had not made the construction of a speech attacking the bill any easier for Bailey Cooper, nor had it acted as a narcotic upon him when he attempted to snatch a few hours for sleep.

Nevertheless, Bailey had prepared his speech, which was a slasher, and had committed it well to memory, and had rehearsed it carefully, over and over, before the mirror of his dresser.

Now, just before he was to deliver that immortal address, had come sarcastic, grinning Jim Donovan of the opposition, with Bailey's own words in defense of the measure, which words, he was bound to confess, did, under the circumstances, seem bombastic enough and inconsistent enough to justify Donovan's contemptuous use of them.

The circumstance would have knocked many an older statesman off his feet, and Cap Digglesby, who was a master hand at detecting good, raw material and fashioning it to the needs of his own loyal, patriotic, and unselfish party—or anybody else's—watched him narrowly.

Good Lord, how that boy did talk! Before Bailey Cooper had cleared the husk out of his throat to say "Mr. Speaker," he had forgotten every solitary sentence, word, and syllable of the speech he had so carefully written and memorized during those many sleepless nights; but he found so many other syllables, words, and sentences in his system, and available for instant use, that he seemed to feel, at the outset, the need of several mouths to give them vent.

He was mad all the way through, was Bailey Cooper—not angry, mind you, but mad!—and he lambasted every annoying thing in and out of sight, from A to Z, and from Z back to A, without ever overlooking a single guilty symbol in his progress in either direction.

Somehow or other, Bailey sensed that he had been tricked, and it was a blessed relief to him, in that the feeling bade him not stay his tongue in whithersover direction it might choose to dart; and he handed out so many of what highly interested Jim Donovan called "wollops," that, had they been physical, Bailey must have had seven superactive fists to deliver them.

He began with the general, all-round cussedness of a political trick which would quote, for an iniquitously political purpose, his own words originally uttered in sincere urgency of an improvement solely and single-heartedly intended for the public good; then, having paid his respects to Assemblyman Donovan, he tore into the bill; into Sledge; into the administration party;

into the black sheep of his own tribe; into the political system which made it possible for tools and employees of public leeches to be sent to the legislature; into the wooden-headed public which sent them there; then jumped back to the bill again; and the particular bit of public knavery which it represented, and tore the eternal and everlasting lining out of it!

As experienced old Calvin T. Luther said in speaking of it later: "There wasn't a bit of damned oratory about it;" but before Bailey was well warmed up Cap Digglesby was looking as if he wished he hadn't done it; and Buckley, the administration leader, was looking positively scared.

Before Bailey got through, however, both Digglesby and Buckley were enjoying, through sheer professional admiration, that fine, red-fisted flow of invective.

Members of his own party, and of the opposition, alike sat forward in their seats, and craned their necks so as not to miss a syllable; members from the cloak and committee rooms, receiving that mysterious electric thrill which tells of "something doing," came eagerly thronging in, and either slipped noiselessly down to their seats or packed themselves solidly in the rear of the chamber; while the three-dollar-a-day pages stuffed their pennies in their pockets, and climbed up on their benches to gaze over the heads of the standing members.

Loafers and sight-seers from the rotunda, corridors, and offices filled the visitors' gallery as if by magic, and left food for a month for the solitary legislative mouse, while the calm and cynical easy-livers up in the reporters' gallery transformed themselves into human dynamos in the twinkling of an eyelash, and, recognizing from the first sentence that here was something of which there would be no typewritten copies, slammed the whole sizzling speech on the wires.

There had been a certain amount of time allotted to Bailey, and when it was expired the speaker tapped his gavel.

Bailey Cooper went right on.

The speaker tapped his gavel again, and members of the opposition shouted "Order," but Bailey Cooper howled them all down. He was there to make a speech, and nothing but force would prevent him from finishing it!

If he were to be violently ejected, he intended to talk all the way to the door, and use his feet and fists to the best possible advantage while he talked!

This was his first and, perhaps, only chance to have his say, and he intended to have it entirely out, if he had to fight the whole gathering, speaker, assemblymen, visitors, sergeants-at-arms, and pages!

This would probably be his last appearance upon the floor of the legislature, for the session was nearly at its close, and he never expected to come back.

As a matter of fact, he didn't give a continental cuss whether he ever came back or not; but while he was there he intended to say just what he thought about things as he saw them, and particularly what he thought—not what the leaders of his party, or anybody else, thought, but what *he* thought—about the Summit Pike bill!

Somehow or other, contrary to all rule and supposed precedent, they let him talk on, and when he got through, he sat down.

The revulsion of feeling came so quickly to him that, before he felt the chair against his shoulders, he realized, with a sickening sense of depression, that he had made an ass of himself; that he had behaved like a petulant schoolboy; that he had forever and ever ruined any chances or hopes of preferment or advancement that he had ever cherished.

There was an annoying racket around him, though. What was all the infernal noise about? Why, they were applauding something or somebody! By George! They were applauding him! *Him!* They were going mad about it, too, clapping their hands and cheering, and the speaker was pounding furiously with his gavel, trying to quiet them!

It was then that Bailey Cooper col-

lapsed, and buried his head in his hands, and surreptitiously rid himself of three tears, two from the right eye and one from the left; then he choked himself in, arose, gathered up the papers and memoranda to which he had never referred, and, with stern and majestic air, walked straight out, as blind as a bat, to hide himself in a dark corner somewhere, and have it out.

In the cloak room, however, he ran straight into the arms of Cap Digglesby, who slammed him on the back and shook hands with him all at once and the same time.

"That was a great speech, kid!" shouted old Cap enthusiastically. "Some of these days, when you learn that you mustn't take the bit in your teeth, you'll be the strongest man in this State."

Other members had followed him and crowded around him with congratulations, and kept him so busy that, by and by, he was happy to find that, since he was suddenly a man, he could get along without that little half hour of hiding away to blubber it all out like a boy; and, with Cap Digglesby and another of his newly found friends, he slipped back into the Assembly to hear old War-horse Buckley's speech in answer to his own.

Buckley was sawing right along, without twitch of a hair, not replying to Bailey's speech at all, but merely pointing out the right of the people to have a free road over the right of way now occupied by the Summit Pike, and proving by extremely dry facts and figures which, however, would add up correctly in cold print, that thirty thousand dollars per mile was only a reasonable, just, and legitimate price.

Of course, the bill carried. There were votes enough in the Assembly, all cocked and primed and eager to bark "Aye" to the bill, to have carried it in defiance of all the oratory which could have been poured in through all the windows through a dozen sessions.

The speeches were not meant, as Bailey Cooper had once supposed, to influence the voting on the bill, but to influence the voters throughout the State in future elections. That is why the pleasant little conspiracy against Bailey, the conspiracy which made Sledge smile and Buckley laugh, was hatched.

Bailey was to attack the bill. Buckley was to attack Bailey for political insincerity, throwing his own words in his teeth, and proving, to the public, that a reform urged by the anti-administration party was claimed to be no reform when the administration put it through!

Well, anyhow, even if the bill was lost, Bailey, personally, had won. He had cast aside his swaddling clothes, and had become a power, a force, a man!

He went home that night, and, as he stepped from the train next morning, he bought all the papers. Every blessed one of them had his name in it! All of them carried parts of his speech, beginning something like:

> The sensation of the day was a remarkably brilliant and forceful speech made by Assemblyman Bailey Cooper, who said——

And then they said what he had said.

The *Courier* carried his speech in full, and called the attention of its readers to the fact that it, personally, had elected that remarkably promising young orator and statesman. There was no denying that Bailey Cooper was "made!"

He had feared, coming down on the train, that he might break into unmanly tears when he saw his mother, but he did nothing of the sort. He patronized her, and let her gloat over him and worship him, and he strutted about the house like a peacock so long as he was in it, and was lord of all he surveyed, and just the slightest bit masterful of the mere womenfolk of his household; which womenfolk, by the way, consisted of just the one mother. Lord love us, she let him strut; she liked it!

When he saw Margaret Holtzman that evening, however, she received him gladly but sadly. Yes, she had seen his name, not only in the *Blade*, but in all the papers, yesterday evening's and this morning's; she had borrowed them around in the neighborhood, and had

read every word, even including all of his speech. It was a wonderful speech, and still more wonderful what a hit he had made with it; and wasn't he proud and happy?

She was for him; and there was a suspicion of moisture in her eyes which made Bailey Cooper, particularly in view of the fact that Mamma Holtzman might be down at any moment, take her suddenly in his arms whether she liked it or not—but she did—and tell her all the fool things he had firmly intended never to say until he could show her a good, legitimate, permanent income, and offer a home of her own to put her into.

Margaret, in turn, did a thing that, under the circumstances, she should never have done, no doubt, although this is open to argument.

She admitted that she loved him. And she kissed him; not only once, but two or three times, and maybe a dozen. After that, she grew suddenly sad and nervous again, and said, though not at all hopefully, that Bailey "would have to see papa."

The reason for her nervous attitude in this matter was made quite apparent when Papa Holtzman came home, accompanied by Carl Schmitt. Papa Holtzman's first act, upon learning the condition of affairs, was to shake his fist in Bailey Cooper's face.

"You tried to do it, but you didn't!" he wildly charged. "The papers say you almost defeated the Summit Pike bill; and you would have done it if you could, wouldn't you?"

"I certainly would," admitted Bailey stiffly, seeing that this was no time for parley or diplomacy, especially since Carl Schmitt was immured in the library, guessing fairly accurately at what was going on, and enjoying the loud voices.

"You own up to it, and yet you want me to let you marry my Margaret!"

"Wait a minute," remonstrated Bailey. "What has the Summit Pike bill to do with Margaret?"

"It's me you're asking now, ain't it?" retorted Holtzman. "I'm interested in the Summit Pike bill, ain't I? You know that I have a thousand-dollar share in that business, and it's worth five thousand easy since this bill passed, even if you didn't help pass it. You know all my friends are in it. You know it's the best thing ever happened to this county, and for the business of this town; yet you tried to kill the bill, and you almost did it! Then you come here and ask me to let you marry my Margaret!"

"I did," admitted Bailey, with no humility whatever. "Moreover, I intend to marry her, whether you say so or not."

"I'll bet you don't!" declared Holtzman, smacking his fists together. "She is going to marry Carl Schmitt. I promised him."

Margaret had been so frightened that she had been visibly trembling, and had clung to a chair for support, but now she giggled. There is no other word to describe it; it was just a plain giggle.

Immediately after she got through with it, however, she stood straight up without a tremble in her, and turned upon her father the same expression, that, in the eyes of her usually meek and obedient mother, had, at least a dozen times in his life, made Papa Holtzman forget entirely, for the time being, that a man is the natural lord and master of the household.

"You may marry Carl Schmitt yourself, papa, if you promised him," she stated, with flat finality. "I never will."

"By gracious, I don't understand the young people nowadays!" exclaimed the dazed Holtzman, who had fought a father, two brothers, and a bulldog, in his youth, to get Mamma Holtzman. Bailey, standing there so quietly and confidently, suddenly annoyed him. "Get off of my property!" he ordered. "You can't come here any more!"

"All right; I'll go," agreed Bailey. "You're going to marry me, aren't you, Margaret?"

"Certainly," she assured him, with a smile.

"That's all I wanted to know," concluded Bailey. "Good night, Mr. Holtzman," and before Holtzman's very eyes, he bent over and kissed Margaret, and walked out of the door, alive!

Papa Holtzman stood immediately under the chandelier, petrified. His daughter swept out of the room.

"Where are you going?" he demanded, wondering, with a quake of fear, too, if he would have confessed it, what was to happen next.

"I am going to bed," she sweetly replied.

"But Carl Schmitt is here to see you!" he expostulated.

"Tell him to go home," she calmly directed. "I am going to bed."

And she did.

IX.

Two hundred and fifty eager patriots rubbed the shoulders that had been put to the wheel, and shook hands with themselves in hearty congratulation as soon as the vote on the Summit Pike bill was announced; then they cheerfully waited for the president of the German-American Turnpike Company, who had already unanimously agreed to accept "not to exceed" thirty thousand dollars a mile for his fifteen miles of turnpike, to walk up to the trough and scoop out their four hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Immediately upon the receipt of this, the glad, glad procession was to file past and receive its dole.

There is a peculiar custom connected with transactions of the sort which Sledge had manipulated in this instance, and that is to have everything paid in coin of the realm; checks, while more convenient, invariably betraying the name of every man through whose hands they have passed, and, worst of all, stating, with brutal frankness, who finally got the money.

Two or three days previous to the date of joy upon which Christian Schmitt was to receive the German-American Turnpike Company's State warrant for all the money in the world, the details of its transfer in solid cash were carefully arranged by Sledge and Bendix in the throne room at the Occident Saloon, with Sledge looking out upon his favorite landscape of two garbage cans and an ash barrel.

"Four hundred and fifty thousand dollars!" repeated Bendix. "I don't like to think of that much real money being taken out into the cold street, even if it's only to carry it from the Market and Produce up to your own bank. I don't see why the warrant can't be drawn upon the First National."

"Because I'm president of it," returned Sledge briefly.

"Yes, I know," assented Bendix. "The Market and Produce is the regular local State bank of deposit, too, and a State warrant is a matter of record. After all, it's only a block and a half to the First National. We'll tell Gainer to have the currency all ready and packed in a suit case; then we'll have some good, safe party not in politics——"

"Bowers," interrupted Sledge.

"——go around with Schmitt, deposit the warrant, and get the money. You'd better telephone Gainer all about it in the first place. Well, 'Curly' Mathews and I will stand out in front of the bank with a well-tamed gun in each coat pocket. Within easy call we'll have four or five good, handy, strong arms, who won't know what it's all about, but will be right there with the smoke wagons if I tip the word. When Schmitt and Bowers come out, we'll hustle them right into my auto——"

There was not the slightest change of expression upon Sledge's enormous lump of countenance, but there was a queer choking rumble in his throat, which quivered his third chin. He was chuckling.

"Why don't you advertise it?" he demanded. "Why don't you get some banners painted, and hire Schroedler's Marching Band?"

"Does sound a little Buffalo Bill," admitted Bendix, himself smiling at the melodrama of it all. "How shall we do it?"

"Like buying a nickel's worth of beer," Sledge answered. "Bowers introduces Schmitt to-morrow; I telephone Gainer it's all right; when Schmitt gets his warrant, he'll telephone me; you and Curly hang out in front of the bank with your guns. That

play's all right, because somebody might try to start something. Schmitt goes into the bank, lays down his warrant, indorses it, gets his suit case, and walks up to the First National, like he was carrying his shirts to the Chinaman. You and Curly loaf along behind, and there you are! I'll be in my room at the bank, put the currency in my vault, and split it in the regular way."

Bendix was silent for a troubled minute or two.

"You don't suppose the Dutchman would try anything, do you?"

For just an instant Sledge turned his cold eyes upon Bendix, and then he shook his head.

"Too much money," he said.

"No, he wouldn't dare," agreed Bendix, thinking Schmitt over carefully, and considering the mental picture with a smile. "I guess that Dutchman is the best cat's-paw we could have found."

"Where do you get that cat's-paw thing?" inquired Sledge, with idle curiosity, his mind now at rest about the whole turnpike deal.

"It's a fairy story," returned Bendix, equally idly.

"Oh!" grunted Sledge, with a complete loss of interest.

"There were some hot chestnuts in the fire, and a monkey wanted them," went on Bendix, a trifle pleased to show his education. "He was too wise a monk to scorch his own mitt, so he conned a cat into raking them out. The cat burned his paws, but the monkey ate the chestnuts."

Once more Sledge's throat chuckled. He could appreciate that situation.

"So they call any guy that pulls the wad across for you and takes the burning a cat's-paw," concluded Bendix.

"I get it," said Sledge indifferently. "You'd better see Bowers this afternoon."

On the next day, Henry T. Bowers, a square-faced lawyer who had gained a lucrative practice through such an entire absence of oratory that he had almost to pry his own jaws open to express an opinion, took Christian Schmitt to the Market and Produce Bank, and inquired for Mr. Gainer.

Gainer, a dapper, sallow, little man, with sharp-cut, absolutely vertical creases in cheeks and brow, studied Christian Schmitt like a sum in arithmetic all the way across the marble-tiled floor to his desk.

"Good morning, Mr. Gainer," greeted Bowers. "This is Mr. Schmitt."

"Yes, I know," replied Mr. Gainer, in one jerk, and shook hands with the same celerity with which he would have touched a hot stove. "Come with me just a minute, Mr. Schmitt," and, snapping his heels upon the tiling like rapidly recurring explosions of a toy pistol, he led the way outside the bank railing to the paying teller's wicket.

"This is Mr. Schmitt, Mr. Wesley," he announced, and was gone.

Mr. Wesley, so lank and white and cadaverous, and so long, that from the outside he looked as if he must be standing upon his own waiting coffin, leaned over and studied Christian Schmitt like a sum in algebra.

"Yes, I know," he admitted. "Pleased to meet you, Mr. Schmitt," and with a graven smile which he supposed to be cordial still upon his lips, he gazed over Mr. Schmitt's shoulder to the next customer.

Two mornings later Tom Bendix called up Mr. Schmitt at the Schneeganz Pork Packing Company.

"I have a wire that the warrant was mailed last night," said Bendix. "Watch out for it. Is it in your morning's mail?"

"It comes by the afternoon, then," replied Christian. "The mail diliffery iss slow by us out here."

"I know it is," returned Bendix, with nervous impatience in his voice. "Well, be there when the postman comes, and grab it. That's an important message, you know."

"I belieff you," agreed Christian gravely.

He already had on his hat and overcoat, and now he put on his gloves.

After that, this much is perfectly clear to everybody. Christian Schmitt took a street car to the Market and Produce Bank, indorsed and presented his warrant for four hundred and fifty

thousand dollars, which had come on the first mail, received his inconspicuous, brown suit case, and walked right out into the middle of Main Street, where the earth opened and swallowed him up.

There is no other way to account for what became of him, for he disappeared as absolutely as if he had turned into a thin whiff of smoke; and no one of the two hundred and fifty eager patriots ever saw a cent of the Turnpike money.

Rumor had it that, two years later, there was seen about the streets of Berlin an old man with white hair cropped so close that he seemed almost bald, and a stiff upper lip which might once have sported a white mustache. It was thought that this old man might have been the defaulting president of the German-American Turnpike Company.

But the man could not have been Christian Schmitt, for his shoulders were bent, and he walked with an unsteady, shuffling step; his clothing was frayed, and every shred bespoke poverty; his upper front teeth were missing, however, and he carried a cane at rather a proud angle.

He may or may not have been Schmitt; but nobody cares. Not the girl who left America with him, for she had flouted him to his face, flirted outrageously before his very eyes, and ran away with all his money, and a man young enough to know how to spend it; not his wife, for shortly after Christian's disappearance, she received an express package containing a tidy sum of money, which she immediately put in a savings bank where it is still drawing untouched interest for Lena's five babies, whom Mrs. Schmitt is helping happily to rear; not the Widow Schneeganz, for she is the proudest hochfrau in Germany, and, since the unfortunate death of Von Burgholz, who perished from trying to adopt the habits of his peers, is engaged to a young Von, more needy, but even more handsome than the once bewailed Christian; not Sledge, for he has long since made up that trifle of money, and only remembers the incident as a fluctuation. So *vale* Schmitt!

The hardest hit man by it all, perhaps, was Rudolph Holtzman, who, with more than a score of other good, decent, progressive members of his ancestral origin, was compelled to bear the disgrace of the German-American Turnpike Company, all for the acts of one man, no more representative of German-Americans as a class than is any other thief.

Of course, the story came out in its entirety; there were too many patriots interested to keep it quiet; and the abortive steal remains the political joke of the State, and will so remain as long as the turnpike lasts.

Perhaps it was the ridicule which hurt Holtzman as much almost as the knowledge, which finally came to him, that the whole thing from the start was a "put-up job," and intended as a swindle, in which he and his straight-dealing friends were but the cheaply purchased cloak of respectability.

At any rate, he turned Carl Schmitt out of his house forever, the first time that discredited young man showed himself inside the door; for, besides Carl's father having turned out to be a notorious thief, had not Carl himself inveigled Holtzman into the scheme?

A few days afterward, Sledge came into Holtzman's place to order a dinner for a big party of patriotic lawmakers, and Holtzman spat out his mind to Sledge, which was a great relief to him.

"What's the use?" rumbled Sledge. "The cat's-paw ate the chestnuts. You lose a thousand, but I lose a couple of hundred thousand for myself and my friends. And why are you squealin' about crookedness? You buy your flour as cheap as you can get it, don't you? And sell your bread for the most they'll pay? Well, I did the same thing with the Summit Pike, only I had to do it under cover, because if I tried it in the open they'd holler their heads off. I'd have got away with it, too, if it hadn't been for a crooked Dutchman. Now don't get sore. He was a crooked one, wasn't he?"

"It was a swindle," stated Holtzman, sticking doggedly to his guns. "I used

to say you done more good for this town than all the reformers in the world."

"You have to say it yet, don't you?" demanded Sledge, who firmly believed it himself.

"I don't know. Maybe," admitted Holtzman reluctantly. "One thing, I don't have anything more to do with anybody who had anything to do with that. Last week I turned Carl Schmitt, old thief Christian's son, away from my house. He wanted to marry my daughter. And before that, I turned away Bailey Cooper. He said he was going to marry her whether I said so or not."

"Bailey Cooper!" repeated Sledge, in surprise. "What's the matter with him?"

"Bailey Cooper?" Holtzman also repeated. "Don't you know? He—he——" Holtzman paused for a moment of dazed thought. "By Geeminy, he tried to kill your bill. He was right, wasn't he?"

"No, he wasn't," denied Sledge. "But say, if Bailey Cooper wants to marry your girl, you'd better let him have her. That boy's a winner. If I could get him on my side, I'd put him in right; but he don't need me. He'll get through by himself."

"You think so?" inquired Holtzman, with an eagerness which betrayed his still-abiding faith in Sledge, and in the fact that Sledge had done more good for the city than all the reformers in the world!

"It's a cinch," declared Sledge. "If you got a chance to get him for a son-in-law, grab him."

"I don't know," returned Holtzman regretfully; "I told him never to come in my house any more."

Sledge almost smiled, but he was too charitably disposed toward Holtzman to really do it.

"Did Bailey Cooper say he was going to marry your daughter?" he wanted to know.

"That's what he said," answered Holtzman.

"Then don't you fuss around about it any," advised Sledge. "He will."

And he did.

SIGSBEE AND THE BURGLAR

IT was two o'clock in the morning of the birthday of young Charlie Sigsbee, son of Admiral Sigsbee. Charlie rushed into the admiral's room, grasped him convulsively by the shoulders, and hissed into his ear:

"Wake up! Wake up! There's a man in the house!"

The admiral, true to his martial instincts, leaped out of bed, grasped his deadly marine revolver, batted his eyes in expectancy of a bloody encounter, and asked his son:

"Where is he?"

"Here he is," said Charlie, with all the effectiveness of melodrama. "I'm twenty-one to-day."

POLITENESS IN IRELAND

SEUMAS McMANUS, the celebrated Irish writer, was in the national capital when he was asked if he thought there was much "graft" in American politics.

"There is an old Irish proverb which I love," he said solemnly. "It is this:

" 'It is impolite to talk about a rope in the house of children whose father was hanged.' "

THE IRONY OF CUPID

Doctor Harvey W. Wiley, the pure-food expert, is regarded as the implacable foe of suffragettes, and has been quoted in speeches as being against their creed. But, when he decided to get married, he picked out a suffragette.

A Cow-puncher Widow

By George Pattullo

This is the story of how the Widow Brownlee ironed out the kinks in the Triangle outfit. Also, it's a most unusual love story, chock-full of humor. And the Widow demonstrates an old theory to the complete and hilarious satisfaction of all concerned

VARIOUS individuals have, from time to time, laid down rules for the handling of men. Most of these rules have their foundations in knowledge of man as a social beast. A person named Napoleon utilized a considerable number with much success, but I am assured that it takes a widow to know them all. The Widow Brownlee knew every one and a lot more besides.

She owned five thousand one hundred and sixty acres on the edge of the "shinnery" and lived in a four-roomed house not far from Hell's Acre. There was no house in the county to compete with it for size and luxury. A male person of sense could never pass her broad stands of orderly cotton rows, of yellowing corn that whispered perpetually to a coy breeze, without feeling a warm antipathy to single lot.

Her incumbrance had been a devout man and had announced in a feeble voice a year after their marriage that he was going "Home." Then he went "Home." A neighbor, Mrs. Trout, whose domicile was only sixteen miles distant, used to say that Brownlee had fared on this awful journey with a happy, expectant smile on his lips; but nobody credited this. Had you put it to a citizen of that section how old the Widow was, he would have answered without hesitation: "Oh, 'bout nineteen, I reckon;" but that was because enthusiasm blinds. She was twenty-four and could cuss like a cab driver, on occasion.

Upon a day in August the Triangle boss rode nineteen miles and asked the Widow to marry him. She said "No," and he rode nineteen miles back. Of course she did not give a flat refusal. That would have been heartless and unfeminine, and would, moreover, have been exceedingly difficult, because of the weird manner in which the boss cloaked his meaning. Bob started in something like this:

"It must be right lonely for you here all alone, Miz Brownlee?"

"Not a bit. Look at all the work I have to do. The help are so lazy. What for should it be?"

"I dunno." The boss smiled wanly, and was heard to mutter something about no men being round.

"No men?" The Widow leaned back to laugh. "I swan there ain't nothing else. They come riding by here every day until there's a trail wore clear round my fences."

This was not what he meant, and the Widow knew it. Turner began to perspire. He studied the praiseworthy motto on the wall, and speculated darkly concerning these loafers. The silence grew hideous, and the Widow choked and made a quick gesture to her lips with a handkerchief. It sounds heartless, but she was enjoying herself immensely. The boss gulped a couple of times, and, fixing his eyes on the Widow Brownlee's cleft chin, propounded a hypothetical question.

"If a young feller, ma'am—just supposing some feller about twenty-eight years old——"

"What would he look like?" she asked.

"Look like?" Bob repeated gropingly.

"Oh, so-so. Tall, kind of—he'd pass in a crowd, maybe. Well, it's like this feller holds down a fair-to-middling job—eighty a month, ma'am, and ten more if ol' Heffelfinger comes up with a raise I done asked for. He ain't saved nothing, but he's a-going to, and he's tol'able steady. Now, supposing this here feller——"

"What are you driving at, anyway?" Mrs. Brownlee showed impatience.

"I ain't making it clear?" the boss exclaimed in the utmost surprise.

"What is it this young fellow's going to do?"

"Why, he was aiming to ask this here girl for to marry him."

"What girl?"

Bob looked wildly about for a steadying influence. The motto arrested the reeling in his brain. He resolved to start again, so he licked his lips and sniggered weakly.

"You see, ma'am—you see, Miz Brownlee, supposing there was a girl who this here feller thought a heap of?"

"What would she look like?"

"Look like?" The boss squared himself with a long sigh of relief, and met her gaze ardently. "She's about twenty, I take it, with brown hair and blue eyes"—then, with devilish cunning—"and a sort of peachy look to her cheeks."

"Go on," the Widow murmured.

"Now, supposing this young feller—of course he ain't good enough for her, you understand, because she's got a heap of fine land and her husband ain't long been——"

"Oh," said Mrs. Brownlee, "it's her land makes her so good, is it?"

"No-o-o. Don't fly up thataway. This here boy thinks the world and all of her, Miz Brownlee. He'd want her if she didn't have the price of a square; honest, he would. Now, supposing this here young feller was to ask this girl if she would have him, what d'you reckon this here girl would say?"

It was done, and Bob mopped his forehead with a certain complacence over a neat job. The Widow sniffed.

"If I knew a girl like that, Mr. Turner, you bet I'd tell her to say 'No.'"

The boss held his handkerchief in mid-air, the props knocked from under him.

"Any man who don't want her any more than to ask like he done, don't deserve her. If she——"

The Widow was becoming mired in hypotheses, and lost all patience.

"Oh, darn! You make me tired," she ended.

Turner picked his hat from the floor and reckoned he had best be moving. At that the Widow tossed her head contemptuously, but she went to the yard to see him mount.

And here is where the amazing ways of her sex enter. She began to tell Bob how sorry she was—she could not marry him, for she did not love him—and he was not to ask her again, especially in that clumsy manner—but perhaps she might learn to care in time—if she were to be the cause of any unhappiness to Bob, she would never cease to reproach herself—it would be best not to see each other for a while—and could Mr. Turner ride over on Sunday for dinner, for she planned to kill a fat turkey?

The Triangle boss sat in the saddle and played with the strings, unable to utter a syllable. When he departed, he could not for the life of him decide whether a gentle melancholy best befitted his situation or he had fallen short of her expectations in not kissing her without further ado.

Ike, a man of large experience, entertained no doubts. He told the boss precisely where he stood.

"She done throwed you down. Yes, sir, she throwed you good, Bob. It's like she'd have flew all to pieces if you'd tried any monkeyshines"—the boss had hinted by delicate inference his regret that he had refrained from tender passages—"that's the way with women. I've been done, and done bad. Even if they don't want you, they won't never let you git away for anybody else to grab. I mind once——"

And he related an adventure which brought him into savage argument with the boss. Turner wanted him to understand that the Widow Brownlee was

a lady and he would not brook mention of her name in the same breath with some of Ike's female acquaintances.

"Oh, ho! Is that so?" said his friend. "I reckon I don't know no ladies, hey? Well, anyway, let's leave it be. But you're away wrong about that dressmaker. I was wanting to tell you, Bob—the cook done went off to town today."

"The cook? What for? Who let him go? We start the round-up tomorrow."

"He drawed his pay, and done got hold of a bottle somewheres. Then he told Heffelfinger that he didn't have to work for the best man alive or take orders from no man. The last I seen of him, him and Uncle Henery was riding to town. They was talking to me about buyin' a few ranches over in Mexico."

The boss needed no explanation of these symptoms. Uncle Henry and the cook would take a vacation whose duration depended on luck and circumstance, and then they would return to duty, repentant and scornful of the flesh pots. In the meantime there were twenty lusty young men to be fed, and they must start the punishing fall work at once. Turner took horse and made fast time to town.

Nature was shrewd and in a kindly humor when she saw to it that man should be beset by responsibilities and a never-ending struggle for existence and place. The boss would have been weakly wretched had he been granted time for introspection; but he had to move and move at top speed. Thus it happened that the Widow Brownlee's refusal did not sear or even scorch. When he thought of her at all, it was with hopeful tenderness. He dismissed the "No" and her tempestuous "Oh, darn," and dwelt rather on the way she had stroked his horse's neck. Furthermore he resolved to wrestle with a leg or two of the Sunday turkey.

The cook and Uncle Henry were far above chuck wagons and round-ups. They offered to dispense hospitality to Turner, but would give ear to no talk of work. Toil was for slaves.

It was vain to remind Tom that he was the finest cook known to ranch annals; he knew that already. Uncle Henry merely scoffed when Bob asked feelingly who would put the underslope on the calves' ears in his absence. The cook desired it to be published broadcast that he would cook for no man, and he would "not take orders from no man." The Triangle would not see him again, neither, as he was done with feeding a bunch of lazy hounds who never even volunteered to carry a bucket of water; and, if Turner entertained a hope to get him back, he must buy some new fire irons.

It ended by the boss hiring a stranger who owed a bill at the Eating House and had been unable to leave town. This individual said he could cook—the outfit he had recently worked with had wept over his departure, in fact—and when Turner saw how he dragged his feet, he was persuaded that he must be a master of the pots and pans.

The Widow Brownlee looked a year younger and twenty years prettier when the boss arrived for Sunday dinner. Her face was red and shiny from basting the turkey aforementioned, and her glowing vigor and sparkling, boyish eyes made the Widow a very desirable creature.

In spite of this, Turner was depressed and fretful. Naturally Mrs. Brownlee concluded that her rejection of his circuitous plea had cast a shadow over his days, little recking that the boss had given scant thought to it. Therefore she looked at him archly. There lived men who would have given all they possessed and a mortgage on their future for that glance of understanding, but it clinked impotently on the armor of Bob's self-centered gloom.

"What's the matter?" she asked at last.

"Oh, it's the boys," he told her. "I cain't figure what's got into 'em. There's the finest bunch of boys in all Texas, ma'am, and they've taken to throwing off on me and quarreling."

Jake had sulked for two days, grumbling at every order the boss gave, and Jake had labored for twenty years in all sorts of weather without question

and in serene indifference. There had been a row between Ike and Shorty. The two were bedfellows, and Mr. Shaughnessy had taken exception to a song Shorty favored in moments of soul solitude. The soloist, in turn, had given out that Ike's ablutions were too few and far between for any gentleman of nice habits to tolerate, and the two did not speak now.

"Do you mean to sit there and tell me those two simpletons sleep together and never say a word?" the Widow ejaculated.

"That's about it, ma'am."

Turner had taken Ike's gun away from him—he carried one in his war bag, defiant of law—fearing the Hibernian temper. This was not all, by any means. The wrangler had let three horses and a work mule stray off, and, when Turner took him to task, had told the boss that if his work did not suit, he knew what he could do.

On top of that the Big Un had informed Dick in an offensive way during a game of pitch that he did not like the set of Dick's eyes, and Dick—the kindliest, gentlest man of them all—had smashed the Big Un in the face, breaking his nose. Only the combined strength of four had prevented a killing at this clash.

"I had to give Charlie his time, too. And Charlie, he was born on this here range."

"Charlie Boon? What for did you fire him? He's a right smart cow hand, Bob."

The boss was too worried to notice the "Bob." Charlie had taken to fighting his horses, and Turner would employ no hand who beat his mount over the head. The Widow Brownlee straightway forgot that this young man wished to wed her, and remembered only that the Triangle boys had been her pride since childhood, and they were in trouble.

"Jim-in-eex, but this turkey is tender, ma'am"—Bob smiled for the first time that day. "This is the only real meal I've had in a week."

"Gracious sakes, how's that? Tom, he's the best cook in the country."

The boss explained that Tom was not with them, but at that moment was lightly tripping the paths of pleasure in town, together with Uncle Henry, who ought to know better. They had a new cook, the most ornery rascal Turner had ever met with. Nothing but dried steak—he did not know how to cook that—the bread was always burned—and the outfit had forgotten the taste of real coffee.

The Widow sat up resolutely as she listened. Turner was babbling away about how he had detected the cook stopping regularly between the spring and the wagon with a bucket of water, to rest and smoke a cigarette.

"How long have you been boss?" she inquired, in a curious wonder.

"Six years, ma'am. And never a row in all them years. The work's all gone to hell—I mean, we'll never get the beef gathered, Miz Brownlee."

"Six years," repeated the Widow, "and you don't know anything. They ought to send Little Joe out to be boss."

"I don't quite take you."

"What did you come here for when things are like that? Who's looking after them boys at this minute?"

"Jake, he's ramrodding to-day. They're cleaning up the corner of the East pasture. We'll camp at Big Spring to-morrow."

"You hurry up with that pudding, and go right back to camp, Bob Turner," the Widow commanded. "I'll be over there to-morrow to fix things up. Boss, indeed! Huh, those men ain't nothing but big boys. Get a move on, now. If any of 'em should get hurt bad, I'll never forgive you, Bob Turner—the poor babies! You know they come riding by here often, grinning in."

The boss stared and fain would have spoken, but Mrs. Brownlee swept him out of the house. He began to suspect that the hour was not propitious for wooing, so he told her to have her own way, and the Widow said she intended to, and he departed at a gallop.

Fat Sam lay under the chuck wagon in camp with an inch-deep slit among the ribs of his right side. From time to time he groaned, more to soothe his

fears than from pain. Work had been abandoned. The outfit sat on their beds and whittled, and said never a word. Shorty had gone to lie down behind a bush, and there he remained, staring at the sky, in an agony of remorse. His dripping knife he had flung into the grass.

The boss looked to the injured puncher, and eased his position. Then he eyed the sullen men sitting apart. Everything was ripe for one of those swift outbreaks that grow from petty causes in lone places and are laid in blood.

"Why ain't you-all working?" he queried.

"I done turned the herd loose. The boys, they wouldn't work," Jake said carelessly over his shoulder.

"Bring up the horses, you. Every man here has got to catch a fresh horse. It's late, but we'll make a round before dark, and you boys'll do night guard over 'em."

One of them laughed. The others went on whittling. Two or three wore faintly amused smiles. The cook sat on a lard bucket under the wagon fly, the only placid member of the outfit, and rolled a cigarette. His fire was not kindled yet, nor had any preparations been made for supper.

"Hurry up with supper, cook. What? No beef? Why didn't you kill a heifer, Jake? Nothing but bacon again"—the cook was too indolent even to boil the salt out of it before frying—"and you ain't cooked no beans."

The shrill neighs of the remuda sounded back of a hill. They swung into view with two work mules in the lead, expectantly footing it for their rations of corn.

"Here's the horses. You, there"—Turner pointed a finger at the cook—"step lively, or what I'll do to you will jar all your kin in Foard County. Now, then, boys, hump yourselves."

No one moved. The boss gathered up his rope very deliberately, hung it on his saddle, and strode over to the Big Un.

"Get your rope and come on, Big Un," he said gently. "I'm getting in a awful hurry."

Turner might be clay in the hands of the widow woman, but even the Big Un respected him in a go-as-you-please, knock-down-and-drag-out debate. Besides, his nose was broken, and was very painful. So the Big Un pondered a moment. He said: "I reckon you're the captain," and sauntered toward the horses, not too fast. The others rose one by one, and followed, still without a word.

They stood guard over the herd that night in two-hour shifts. Shorty insisted that he be allowed to take Sam's place, though there was no dearth of men to make it necessary; and the boss permitted it because he was worried over the cowboy's bitter self-reproach.

Of course nobody dreamed of taking Shorty into custody or otherwise punishing him for the stabbing. This was a family affair, and they would settle it among themselves. Twice Turner, who never closed his eyes during the dragging hours of dark, saw Shorty emerge from the blankets to tiptoe over for a look at Sam. He wanted to make certain that he still breathed and was comfortable.

A crowd of cotton pickers could have made the round next morning as efficiently as did the Triangle men. The cattle seemed to sense their disorganization, and were proportionately stubborn. Scores of them were permitted to break back through the cordon, and there was a meager handful gathered on the round-up ground. The boys returned early to camp, morose and riding singly.

After they had turned the horses loose, Dick tripped over a saddle lying on the ground, disarranging the blanket spread over it. The owner wanted to know why Dick could not lift his feet in walking. If he had stopped there, all would have passed peacefully, because Dick restrained the hot answer on his lips; but the cowboy went further and drawled viciously of Dick's work in the round-up. A cutting horse had almost thrown him, which was a sore blow to Dick's pride.

"You keep that mouth of yourn shut," he warned.

"What for should I?"

"I'll soon close it for you."

He rose from the pile of bedding on which he sat. All the others stood up, too. The two approached each other leisurely. Dick's antagonist held an open knife with which he had been whittling a stick, and he made no move to put it away.

Turner came running from the tent.

"That'll do," he said shortly. "I've had about enough of this. Dick, go help with the horses. You, there, pack some water for the cook. Dinner's late."

"I don't know as I will," Dick replied without heat. "You've been giving orders pretty smart lately, Turner. I'm getting kind of sick of it."

"Oh, you are, hey? Well, I want to say right here that any man who don't like to take orders can get his time right now."

His hearers waited a reasonable period to give him a chance to finish whatever he had to say, and then a dozen of them took up his offer. They were tired of making exhibitions of themselves, and preferred to be paid off. The Triangle was not what it had been, and, if Turner expected he could work seasoned cowmen like a parcel of boys, he had something to learn yet. Dick and the other forgot their difference, and headed the opposition. It was open mutiny.

The boss faced them in perfect composure; but he was sick at heart. If these men went back on him, the round-up was doomed, and the loss to his employers would be measured in the tens of thousands. Gone forever, too, would be his power as boss.

"This makes it different," he remarked.

"Well, let's catch our horses," Dick suggested.

They were arrayed thus undecidedly when the Widow Brownlee arrived, mounted on a sway-backed sorrel.

"Hello, boys," she called.

"Howdy, Miz Brownlee," they returned.

Instead of carrying out his purpose, Dick hastened to her side, and tied the sorrel to a bush.

She looked swiftly from Turner to the men.

"What's the matter with you boys?" she asked. "I never seen you so quiet. You, there, Ike, you ain't even asked me how long I'm going to keep you waiting."

Ike grinned foolishly, and the Widow crossed to the chuck wagon. Then she glanced into the pots, and emptied a feminine shriek of dismay. The outfit sank their grievances for the nonce, and listened to Mrs. Brownlee harangue the cook. Such filth she vowed she had never set eyes on; he need not try to tell her there were no facilities for the exercise of his art. The cook strove sullenly to convince himself that this young woman possessed no sort of authority over him; therefore, he would not stand for it. Nevertheless he gave obedience.

Mrs. Brownlee would not permit him to touch the food. She made him carry numberless buckets of water, and scrub and rub uselessly at the pots and pans until even the rust began to give way. Herself flew between fire and chuck box.

Shortly there was beef roasting in an oven; there were ribs being barbecued over the coals; coffee was steaming and bubbling and threatening to put the fire out; and the hungry cowboys could smell beans. They bore a savor never before suspected in beans. The bread, too, was rising white and light over its bed of ashes. Soon a delicate brown tint proclaimed its even baking.

The boss trailed her about, solicitous and worshiping. Sometimes he tried to help, and mixed things up, and was roundly berated. Jake wandered idly over to Ike's bed to observe that Miz Brownlee could give cards and spades to all the womenfolk of the country. They had not exchanged a word in seventy hours, but Ike said: "You're damned whistlin'," and called to the Big Un to express the hope that his bandaged nose did not prevent him smelling the roast. The Big Un grinned,

though there was a hunger ache between ears and jaw.

The Triangle still talk of that dinner round their camp fires. Mrs. Brownlee was everywhere, radiant and domineering, a long brown curl persistently creeping down into her eyes. Once when lifting the lid from the bread, some ashes fell into the puffed, creamy batch, and the Widow let fall a naughty word. It stirred the boys more than a thousand sermons could have done, and they repeated it delightedly, with reverent shakes of the head.

"Now, I'll cook supper," she declared to Turner afterward. "And then you can take me home. And I'll come back early to cook breakfast."

"But it's eleven miles. We've got a tent you can have, ma'am."

"Anybody else might," said Mrs. Brownlee, "but I'm a widow, and I've got to be careful."

"Yes, ma'am," said the boss humbly.

She dispatched the cook to her home for vegetables, scorning him for an assistant. Then she dressed Sam's wound while the boys stood off and wondered why in thunder Shorty could not have been more promiscuous in his knifing while he was about it. Sam—ever a crafty person—though easily able to be up, had a relapse and said in a weak tone that he might be better in a few days with good nursing. That program was shattered by the boss ordering Sam to be in the saddle on the morrow, or he would send him to headquarters in a wagon. Sam's wife lived at headquarters, and the threat served.

They went hallooing on the drive, dragging the country as with a fine-tooth comb. A thousand head were propelled to the round-up ground, and they worked the herd and branded with celerity and profane abandon. The Big Un brought to light the makings of a smoke for Dick, and got off an involved joke on the appearance of his face. Whereat Dick turned sideways and apologized and gripped his hand hard when nobody was looking. The Big Un said a little later that the set of Dick's eyes had never really been offensive at all.

A steer gave Shorty a wild chase, and his horse stuck his foot into a dog hole, and fell and stepped on Shorty's shoulder in regaining its feet. And Shorty remounted, swearing cheerily, and brought back the fugitive at a hurtling run. When the Triangle worked in unison, they made the heart glad.

It is the custom among cow outfits to breakfast before dawn, that a full day's work may be rendered. Very little is eaten; the older a man is in the life, the less breakfast he puts away. A cup of coffee and a cigarette sustain many a hardy citizen from sunup to noon in the cattle country; but he must have that coffee well made. The Widow knew this, too. She arrived in camp at an hour when city gentlemen of convivial habits are reluctantly planning to retire for the night, and with her was Glossy Golden Thatcher. The sky was leaden gray, and the coyotes were yowling their song to the sun.

They cooked fresh steak and bread, and sent the Triangle boys off to the morning's toil heartened and telling stories despite the early chill. After that they ordered the cook away to gather firewood—he sat down to rest four times while chopping a mesquite—and stretched out in the boss' tent for a sleep before the sun should come to his strength.

At noon the outfit loped in, hungry and expectant. Once again they were fed throat-full, wolfing the food, and lolled about afterward, basking in the heat while the wrangler brought the horses up.

"It's just like it used to be. You're sure a wonder, Miz Brownlee," said the boss.

A note in his voice flurried the Widow—she was tired and unstrung, anyway—and she pushed quickly past him at the door of the tent, and cried to Steve:

"Steve, what do you mean by not going over to see Mary Lou?"

The outfit sat up expectantly, gloating at Haverty.

"What's the trouble, Miz Brownlee?"

"You had ought to be ashamed of

yourself, Steve Haverty. Sulking thisaway. You go and tell her you're sorry."

"Sorry? What for, ma'am?"

"For not kissing her when she done give you the chance. Oh, I heard all about it. I declare men are blind nowadays."

A crackling laugh went round the circle, and with that laugh all was well again with the Triangle. The Widow turned hurriedly into the tent, and met the boss, who seemed agitated.

"No, I'm not," she cried angrily. "I'm not crying. Don't be a fool. But they're such children."

Shortly came Heffelfinger, the manager, driving two passengers in his buckboard. They proved to be the cook and Uncle Henry, very humble of mien, but fiercely sensitive to levity.

Tom lost no time. He began to prowl, snorting among his pots, and all knew that supper would be epochal. The prodigal next inspected the chuck box, and inquired of the deposed cook whether he had graduated from the bumpers of a freight or was he just born the way he found himself? Tom had a very sarcastic tongue, and was inclined to be insulting after a holiday. He admitted privately to the boss, however, that the widow woman knew a trick or two in cooking, and he would take pleasure in teaching her more.

"Pshaw! There ain't no credit in it," the Widow assured Heffelfinger, very pink of cheek. "The boys' stomachs were all wrong. A man ain't never a man, Mr. Heffelfinger, unless you feed him right. They're right good boys, these of yours. Look at them."

The manager held some further parley with Uncle Henry and the cook, and headed for the ranch. While the outfit was saddling fresh horses, the boss busied himself knotting a rope.

"What're you doing now?" the Widow demanded, from her seat on an upturned fruit box.

"I aim to take to that there so-called cook," Bob replied. "The feller I done hired in town who made the last outfit he worked for cry like children when he quit."

"Don't be silly, Bob. Everything's fine now. Set him to work washing the dishes. That's all he's fit for."

The boss laid down the coil, and looked at her purposefully.

"Judy, you said just now that most fellers was blind and——"

Mrs. Brownlee put the tent pole between them. She pointed through the flap at Glossy Golden moving in plain sight near the wagon, where Tom was cleaning up. The boss snapped his fingers at Glossy Golden, at Tom, and the whole wide world.

"What was that you said about supposing a young fellow?" she hastened to ask, dodging nimbly.

The formula did not interest Turner in the least. A conviction fired his mind, and he replied that so far as he was concerned, all such tittle-tattle as "supposing this here young feller was to ask this girl" might go to blazes.

"Judy, I want you," he whispered, when the only part of her face visible was a portion of one eyebrow and the tip of an ear.

The Widow Brownlee was not struggling very hard. Even a girl would have known better than that, and the Widow was vastly wiser.

"I suppose that girl will have to say yes, just to help you look after these boys. Don't, Bob. They'll see us."

They were engaged in the usual procedure when Ike came to the tent on a mission connected with the disappearance of a keg of horseshoes, and stuck his flaming head inside. He was a man of no polish, and emitted a rude and raucous guffaw. Then his long body followed the head, and he shook Mrs. Brownlee vigorously by the hand.

"What'd I tell you, Bob? Hey?" Ike cried. "Didn't I say all along you had her throwed and tied?"

She was a remarkable woman, was the Widow Brownlee. It is my firm conviction that were there a million more like her, life would lose half its sting.

A Rain Check

By Charles E. Van Loan

Author of "A Job for the Pitcher," "The Cast-Off," Etc.

Baseball is the cleanest professional sport in the world. A crooked baseball player is so rare a bird as to be almost unknown—not quite unknown, however, for Van Loan tells about two of them, and they are drawn from life

"HE didn't *prove* anything on us," argued "Red" Lynch hopefully, as he settled down in the smoker of the night express.

"O' course not!" snarled Jake Hartwell. "He didn't have to. I tell you we're in Dutch, and all because you made a sucker play, and met the man you were doing business with out on a street corner for every one to see. Oh, you're a smart guy! You couldn't have waited for that money for a day or so!"

Red refused to have his argument sidetracked.

"But if he doesn't prove it," he demanded, "how is he going to keep us out of organized baseball? Tell me that!"

"Huh!" snorted the indignant Hartwell. "You talk like a man that *wants* him to prove it! I tell you that we're up against the same thing as a blacklist, and Flannery can queer us in any league in the country. If we get gay, he'll put in his testimony before the commission, and there we are. Gee! I wish we'd punched Levine in the nose the first time he talked business!"

"Yep," assented Red, sighing. "I'd ought to turned up that big beak of his until it'd rained in it and strangled him! Trying to get away with it twice in ten days was what cooked us. I'd give something to know what put Flannery next!"

"The betting, of course!" said Hartwell. "What else?"

Jake was right. Jake had an analytical mind. Given a knothole in the fence, he could usually see daylight on the other side.

Joe Flannery, the manager of the Keatsville Baseball Club in the T. D. League, was no analyst, but when he learned that Sam Levine and a few others of his sort were openly making a strong book on each day's game at fluctuating odds, the little manager started out on a quiet tour of investigation.

When betting is eliminated, most sports remain honest and fair, but when the door is opened to the professional gambler, danger comes with him. Flannery knew that the drawing power of his team depended upon the belief, deep-rooted in the heart of every bleacher customer, that the games which he paid his money to see were "on the level." The ethics of the case never bothered Joe, but the business angle of the case appealed to him in an instant. He quietly investigated Sam Levine's "book," learned who was doing the betting, and found out how much money was being handled daily.

"Levine wouldn't run a book for his little old five per cent.," thought Joe shrewdly, "and he never had any part of a straight proposition in his life. He's always got an ace in the hole, and maybe he's got one here."

Joe hired a private detective, and inside of three days word came that Levine was covering every cent of the local wagers at even money on a certain Tuesday's game. The visiting club was a notoriously weak one, and the

Keatsville team should have been a strong favorite. This in itself was enough to warrant suspicion.

Red Lynch worked on Tuesday, with his battery mate, Jake Hartwell. In the fifth inning Hartwell threw a short bunt wild into right field, Lynch walked two men in succession, and the next man up hit an absolutely straight ball to the center-field fence for a home run.

Again in the seventh inning Lynch, whose control was proverbial, walked one man, hit another, and on the double steal Hartwell heaved the ball over the second baseman's head into center, and another run came in. Joe Flannery made a note of these things, kept his own counsel, and redoubled his interest in Sam Levine's operations.

For several days no suspicious circumstance was reported; Levine seemed to be booking on a percentage basis. Then, on the night of the ninth day, with a tail-end team in town to open a series, the bookmaker again offered even money on the visitors, and did a land-office business. Flannery did not fail to note that Red Lynch was scheduled to work in the open game against the tail-enders.

Lynch threw his own game away in the seventh inning, and again Hartwell's wild throwing to bases contributed to the defeat. That night the private detective followed Red, saw him meet Sam Levine on a street corner, and watched the couple disappear into the back room of a saloon. Five minutes later Jake Hartwell walked into the place, bought a glass of beer, and entered the back room.

The next morning Joe Flannery summoned both men to the office.

"I'm on," he said grimly. "You needn't say a word; I've got you with the goods, both of you. I know the man you did business with; I know where you went to cut the money. If it wasn't for stirring up a dirty mess in the papers, I'd have you blacklisted and kicked out of baseball, but I'm not going to ruin the attendance this season just for a pair of thieving rats like you. I don't care where you go, so long as you get out of this town quick, and you can bet your life that if either one of you tries to shove his nose back into organized baseball, I'll pull this testimony on you."

Here Joe tapped a fat envelope which lay on the desk in front of him. That envelope contained blank contracts for next season, but the bluff worked well.

"Here's what money is coming to you. Now, beat it!"

The newspapers had a great deal to say about the team's sudden loss. Joe Flannery said nothing save that he had had a "racket" with Lynch and Hartwell, and that they had quit in a fit of temper. He knew that the plain truth would hurt the Keatsville Club, beside breeding a general suspicion against the honesty of the cleanest professional sport in the world. A crooked baseball player is so rare a bird as to be almost unknown, and when you stop to consider how many thousands of professionals have played baseball in America in the last thirty years, the number of them blacklisted for dishonesty is astonishingly small.

Flannery had no desire to add two names to that short list, and he felt confident that his threat would keep Lynch and Hartwell from attempting to secure work in any minor league in the country. He was perfectly satisfied after he paid a short visit to Sam Levine.

"Look here, you milk-bottle thief," was Flannery's opening remark, "I'm going to tell you something for your own good. You can get away with it this time, but if you try to hook up any more of my players, I won't do a thing but beat that big nose of yours all over your fat face. Savvy? All—over—your face! And then I'll make this town too hot to hold you."

Flannery had "influence" with many politicians, and Levine knew that he could make good his threat, so he said nothing, contenting himself with a general denial.

Some of the Keatsville players may have suspected the truth, but pride in the team held them silent, and Red Lynch and Jake Hartwell were whirled away to new fields, quarreling as they

went. They had received one hundred dollars apiece for the last bit of business, and they felt, too late, that they had sold their athletic birthrights for a song, and a pretty poor song, at that.

Lynch fumed and railed, but Hartwell, the more resourceful, was busy with a plan, which he unfolded bit by bit.

"We might as well go the limit now," he said. "They've got us blacklisted for fair, and there isn't a league in the country where some scout wouldn't spot us. Now, I know a town a long way from here——"

A stranger in Tucson, Arizona, would have no trouble in locating the sporting center of that sporty little Southwestern city. It was a billiard parlor on the main street, recognized as the official "hangout" for baseball players, boxers, and other professional gentlemen.

The particular stranger which we have in mind made a few casual acquaintances, and, quite naturally, Patsy Delaney, the manager of the Tucson "Eagles," came by the information that there was a new player in town. Now, baseball thrives in Arizona. It is true that there is no recognized league in operation, but every town in that part of the country has a baseball team, and a schedule is arranged and played out to the bitter end. Every manager "has his eye out" for promising material, and inducements are offered the athletic visitor to tarry a while and breathe the invigorating air of the great Southwest.

Patsy sought out the stranger and asked a few questions.

"They tell me you've played baseball," said he.

"Some."

"What position?"

"Behind the bat mostly," said the stranger, "but I can play first or the outfield."

"Hum! Hit any?"

"Oh, about two-ninety in the semi-pro leagues around St. Louis."

Patsy whistled. He could use a two-ninety hitter very handily, especially if he could work behind the bat, for that was where the Eagles were weak.

"Come on out to the park to-morrow afternoon," suggested Delaney. "Most of the boys will be out there, and I'd like to look you over. If you shape up all right, I'll make you a proposition."

Needless to state, there was nothing at all the matter with the way "George White, of St. Louis," shaped up. His throwing to the bases was nothing less than a revelation, and he "got the ball away" with a snap that kept the second baseman and the shortstop up on their toes all the while. Even Jack Gibbs, the regular catcher, admitted that White was the best "pegger" he had ever seen.

In the batting practice, Lew Kelly, the Eagles' mainstay in the box, went out on the slab under instructions to "put something on the ball" for the stranger. Lew obeyed orders, but the way White fell on his wide, round-house curve and spattered it to all corners of the lot was discouraging, to say the least.

Afterward Lew rested in the shade of the stand while the infielders performed the usual stunts. In that company, George White, of St. Louis, loomed up as a Triton among the minnows. Everything that he did was done without effort and with the easy grace of long experience.

"He's a bear, Pat," said the discomfited Kelly. "Did you see the way he murdered that drop ball of mine?"

"You bet!" said the manager cheerfully.

White asked for the verdict a few minutes later.

"How about it?" he said carelessly. "Think you can use me?"

"*Use* you!" ejaculated Delaney. "You bet your life I can use you! Two games a week. The players split the money sixty and forty after the management takes out twenty-five per cent, of the gross."

"Uh-huh!" said White, without enthusiasm. "And how much does this cut usually run?"

"Never less than twenty-five dollars and sometimes as much as forty," said

Delaney, fully expecting to see White's eyes light up at the news.

"Not good enough," said White coldly. "I'll tell you what I'll do. Make it a guarantee of fifty a week and you're on."

Delaney hesitated. The Eagles had some important games scheduled, and if he could win a few of them, the gate receipts would be swelled.

"I'll try you for a week," he said.

This was on a Tuesday. Each afternoon some of the players went to the park for practice, and, as in every town, the embryo diamond stars turned out to assist them. On Thursday six members of the Tucson team were languidly warming up on the field, when a lanky, red-headed young man climbed down out of the bleachers where he had been sitting in solitary judgment. The red-headed stranger removed his coat, vest, collar, and tie, and, borrowing a glove from a small boy, took a place in the line with the near-performers.

White was sitting on the ground in front of the grand stand, tinkering with a wind pad, and Patsy Delaney was conversing with the new catcher.

"Who's the brick-top?" asked White. "Looks to me like a pitcher."

Patsy scrutinized the newcomer

"You can search me," he said. "Some tramp ball player, I guess. The woods are full of 'em."

"Well," said White, after some time spent in watching the stranger, "I don't know about his being a tramp, Pat, but, take it from me, he sure is one pippin of a pitcher. He's got a fast curve there that would knock your eye out!"

"Is *that* so?" said the manager, beginning to show some interest. "I hadn't noticed it."

"Well, *I* have," announced White positively. "Whe-e-w! What do you know about that speed? Talk about a smoke ball! Tell you what I'll do. I'll get him to pitch some to me, and we'll turn him loose on these fellows in the batting practice. You understand, I haven't seen Lew Kelly in a game yet, and I don't know how good he really is, but I've seen him warm up, and, *believe me*, this redhead has got more than Kelly ever saw!"

"Think so?" said Delaney eagerly. "Try him out. If we had another good pitcher now we'd be loaded for bear."

White loafed over and spoke to the lanky stranger.

"Come on, kid!" he whispered. "The manager's over by the stand. He wants to see how you work against hitters. Give him some of that Class-A stuff."

The redhead went into the box, whirled over a few preliminary balls, and Delaney sent his Eagles up with instructions to tear the cover off the ball.

"Dutch" Schmidt, Tucson's famous home-run hitter, almost broke his back reaching after a fadeaway drop; "Mouse" McGhee, the fighting shortstop, "swung like a garden gate," and "Kid" Peters, "Moose" Jones, and "Smiling" Kelly did no better. The redhead made them look foolish with a dazzling succession of fast balls, slow balls, curve balls, and a jumping inshoot, which hummed as it cut the inside corner of the plate. The Eagles were wounded in their vanity, but Patsy Delaney was the happy man. There was no need for White's strong indorsement.

"Can he *pitch!*" snorted the catcher. "Why, say, that sorrel-top has got half these big leaguers cheated! He's a wonder, I tell you. *Grab* him!"

So the sorrel-top was grabbed. He said that his name was Eli Bates, and he came from Eugene, Oregon, where he had pitched ball "a little." Pressed for facts, he modestly admitted that he "usually" struck out about fifteen men, had a record of eighteen for nine innings, and "but for his old man," who, it transpired, was a Methodist minister, might have signed a contract with the Portland Club of the Pacific Coast League. He was quite willing to work for a guarantee of twenty-five dollars per game, but would expect a bonus of fifteen if he won.

On Saturday morning the Bisbee "Grizzlies" came whooping into Tucson for a two-game series. The Grizzlies were a chesty aggregation, which had

been making life burdensome for the Phœnix "Terrors," the Prescott "Grays," and the Cananea "Coyotes."

The Eagles had always been easy plucking for the Bisbee club, and the sporting men who journeyed with the team offered to bet two to one on the game in which Moreno would pitch, or eight to ten that the Grizzlies would win both games. Pete Moreno, a Mexican, was their star pitcher, with a season's record of eleven victories and a single defeat.

"Better get you some of that two to one," said White to Delaney. "I've taken fifty dollars' worth myself. This Oregon baby will eat 'em alive!"

Lew Kelly pitched on Saturday, and was properly and painfully lambasted by the Grizzlies. The only bright spot was the work of the new catcher. He threw out the first three men who started to steal second base, caught one man napping off first and another off third, and made three long hits out of four times at bat. After the fourth inning the Grizzlies hugged the bases and waited for the safe hits; George White, of St. Louis, had them "glued to the sacks," as the morning paper expressed it.

But on Sunday the "Oregon baby" was called upon to face the invincible Moreno, and, as White had prophesied, he ate them alive. Just as a sample of what he could do if really pressed, Eli Bates, of Eugene, struck out the first four men who faced him, and sent the entire Grizzly line-up back to the bench sore from swinging at his deceptive curves. Some of them drew fouls, which White cared for; others hit weakly down the infield and were tossed out at first base. In about seven minutes Tucson was aware that the red-headed recruit "had something," and the betting odds switched to even money.

Pete Moreno held his own until the sixth inning, when White smashed out a long triple, and the redhead followed him with a vicious line drive between Moreno's shoulder and ear. White scored, and the Mexican pitcher blew up with a loud report. Before he recovered Dutch Schmidt whaled the ball over the left-field fence, and three runs won the game.

The morning paper proudly called attention to the fact that Bates struck out fourteen men, gave only one base on balls, and allowed but two hits, one of which, it was pointed out, was of the petty-larceny variety.

Bates and White became popular heroes, receiving homage, "bit" cigars, and kind words that night at the billiard parlor. Tucson, said the followers of the national pastime, was now on the baseball map. Let the Grays, the Coyotes, and the Terrors take notice.

The Prescott Grays brought a brass band with them, and it went away playing a funeral march. Eli Bates—"Get There, Eli," as he was christened—was responsible. He pitched both games, allowing five hits in eighteen innings, and the scores were 4 to 0 and 7 to 1 in favor of the Eagles.

The citizens presented Eli with a gold watch on the Sunday when he pitched against the Terrors; score, Eagles 2, Terrors 0.

In no time at all the Eagles, once a team feared by none, became the terrors of the Arizona circuit. The betting switched until Tucson men fought for a chance to bet two to one on Bates whenever he pitched. Patsy Delaney took his club on a tour, and it won eight games out of ten, Eli Bates scoring six shut-outs.

Delaney bought a diamond horseshoe as big as a silver half dollar and formally challenged every team west of the Mississippi River. He had won a small fortune betting on Bates' games, and the redhead had never even been close to defeat.

One night, shortly after the Eagles returned home, "Oily Tom" Blake, a gambler reported to be worth well into five figures, received a call from George White. George sparred very cleverly for an opening, found it, and unfolded a plan which caused Oily Tom to set out some very aged liquor and open a box of cigars. Then he listened intently for twenty minutes, nodding from time to time.

"It's the softest thing you ever saw," urged White. "They'll give any kind of odds you want to name, because this pitcher hasn't lost a game, and never even had to pitch his best against these clubs. To make it all the better, these Eagles can't hit Moreno with a bed slat. That Mexican's a mighty good pitcher. And if we don't get any runs off him, it'll be the easiest thing in the world to slough the game to Bisbee. Say something happens to this Bates, and he gives a couple of bases on balls and I cut in with a wild heave over a baseman's head—there goes your old ball game, eh? Why, it's as safe as a government bond. The amount of money they're betting now, you ought to be able to clean up eight or ten thousand."

"Yes," said Blake thoughtfully, "but what security do I get for my money? How do I know that you ain't going to cross *me* instead of everybody else in town?"

White fished out a roll of bills.

"Put that in with what you bet," he said. "That's Bates' money and mine —five hundred. Think we'd double-cross our own bets?"

This conference took place on a Monday night. On Saturday the Bisbee Grizzlies were coming over to play their last engagement. They were not overconfident; Bates had beaten Moreno three times, and struck out so many of the Bisbee players that it was becoming a habit with him.

With Bates in the box, the Tucson sports would "stand a tap" without the least hesitation.

"Pretty soft," was Oily Tom's mental comment. "Now, to get the money down." It would never do for Blake to appear in the transaction, but a man from Bisbee might do the work. Blake wrote a letter, and sat down to wait developments. He knew the man to whom the letter was written too well for that man's peace of mind, and he felt sure that his friend Mayhew would not fail him.

On Thursday a man registered at the best hotel in Tucson, and scrawled "Bisbee" after his name.

"I understand," said this individual, "that there's some money here that says you've got a ball club in Tucson."

"All the two to one you want!" said the clerk. "There's a man right over there by the cigar stand who was just saying he'd like to get a bet."

And then, quite by accident, of course, Tom Blake drifted over to the desk in time to hear the Bisbee man say that Moreno's arm was better than ever. Tom stated his opinion that Moreno was "yellower'n a canary bird," and, of course, the man from Bisbee offered to bet that he wasn't, and the hotel clerk held the first wager.

That was the opening gun of the campaign, and Oily Tom was under cover. Tucson received this Bisbee booster with open arms, whereupon he flashed a roll of bills as thick as a man's wrist, and announced his intention of going broke if Pete Moreno was not the greatest pitcher in the Southwest. Tucson was willing to accommodate him, and he did a land-office business for two days, and no bet was too large for him and none too small. All he wanted was two to one, and he got it, and his only stipulation was that the money should go on the game in which Moreno pitched.

On Saturday, as a sort of grace before meat, Lew Kelly managed to beat the Grizzlies by a score of 6 to 5, "Smoke" Snyder working in the box for the visitors. This left the Sunday's battle between Bates and Moreno, as every one knew it would be, and there was another rush of Tucson money, which the Bisbee men covered at the usual rate of one for two.

"She's working fine," said Tom Blake to White, who called upon the gambler at his rooms in the hotel. "We've got about thirty-eight hundred bet against seventy-six hundred, and we'll get another thousand on to-night sure. Your money was bet the first thing. Pat Delaney got most of it. But, see here, if this is worked too raw, there may be trouble. These people would just naturally lynch you if they should get onto anything."

"Leave it to us," said White easily. "There won't be anything that doesn't

look natural. You know this club won't hit that Mexican's curve ball. I can hit it and Bates can hit it, but we're going to miss it to-morrow. Bates is going to hold 'em down to goose eggs for six or seven innings, and then we'll shoot a couple of runs in without anybody knowing how it was done. Don't you worry, old horse. You grab all the money you can get, and we'll deliver. You see that we get our fifty per cent. of the clean-up; that's all."

"All right," said Blake. "If you're satisfied, I am. But you remember and don't be too raw with this thing. I've seen men hung in this country for less."

Sunday dawned clear and cool, under a sky dappled with tiny fleecy clouds. The sporting population of Tucson managed to exist until noon, when it snatched a hasty lunch, and the exodus to the ball park began. The lone ticket seller, working with both hands, surveyed a waiting line, and remarked to himself that it was going to be a big day, if not *the* big day, of the season.

White and Bates met outside the shack which served as a dressing room for the players. It was characteristic of White's caution that he had seldom, if ever, been seen in the company of the red-headed pitcher.

"Remember, now," was the catcher's warning. "We can't make this thing *look* bad. It's got to be done *artistically*. This is the country where they string you up to a telegraph pole, you know. Maybe it would be a good thing to walk a couple of men and let Culpepper or Bateman hit it a mile. They'll hit hard enough if you'll groove 'em for 'em. And shut 'em out the first part of the game. Don't pull it until the seventh, anyway. Savvy?"

"Jake," said the pitcher admiringly, "you've got a great head for business, haven't you? Leave it to me. I'll blow this game so nice and easy that these folks won't know how bad they're hurt for a week."

Then they went out where glory waited and sporting Tucson stood up and welcomed those precious burglars as she has never welcomed a President of the United States.

The Grizzlies arrived in a tallyho coach, and the few Bisbee rooters gave them a loyal welcome. Pete Moreno, buried in an immense sweater, tenderly peeled the wrappings from his wonderful right arm and began warming up, and on the other side of the stand Eli, the idol of Tucson, leisurely proceeded to take the kinks out of his elbow.

The man from Bisbee stood up in the front row of the grand stand and announced that he still had a few hundred dollars remaining.

"Might as well be broke as the way I am!" he shouted cheerfully. "One to two that Moreno wins!"

A slight wind sprang up from nowhere, and the western sky became overcast. Not a soul had leisure to note this. All were listening to "Silver Bill" Barrett, the umpire.

At the end of the customary announcement, Silver Bill shot in a phrase on his own account.

"And may the best team win!" he shouted. Silver Bill was a Tucson man heart and soul, but he was also a square umpire, much respected in the community.

In the silence which comes when men and women are keyed up to the utmost tension, "Pug" Bateman walked into the batter's box, Eli Bates uncoiled himself, and sent a strike ball whizzing over the plate, and the memorable battle was under way.

Why describe the first six innings? Pete Moreno drove the few Bisbee men crazy when he struck out White in the third inning and followed by making the peerless Eli hit a weak foul back of first base.

Eli retaliated by keeping the ball high up on the inside, to the extreme discomfiture of the Grizzly wallopers, who could not hit it out of the diamond. Eight men he fanned in six innings, and Pete Moreno, pitching with unusual nerve and control, made five of the Eagles throw away their bats.

Considering it as a contest between pitchers, it was a remarkable exhibition, but Tucson unhesitatingly awarded premier honors to Eli, the incomparable. Moreno had been hit safely three times

and had given one base on balls; the Grizzlies had yet to make their first single, and Eli had issued no transportation. The score was represented by a double row of ciphers on the board; excitement ran high and loud, and the few Bisbee men realized with sinking hearts that Eli was pitching as they had never seen him pitch before.

At the end of the sixth inning, White found a chance to whisper to Eli.

"Better let 'er go in this inning," he whispered. "It's clouding up, and there may be a storm. Slip in one or two runs, and it'll stiffen this Mexican's backbone. They'll never get a foul off him if he gets a lead."

Eli looked at the sky. The wind was bringing great masses of black clouds out of the west; there was the "feel" of rain in the air.

"String along with me, Jake," was the answer. "Same old signals."

Eli was a proud young man with a dash of the artistic temperament. He could not help thinking of the pitiful disappointment of the pretty girls in the grand stand who believed him to be without a peer. He wasted no sympathy on Patsy Delaney, for instance; Patsy, who had bet more money than he could afford, and given odds of two to one. The artistic temperament often causes a man to overlook the main point in an argument.

Joe Dorsey, the weakest hitter on the visiting club, who waited on a pitcher because he was afraid to hit and miss, opened the seventh inning, and Eli soon had three balls and two strikes on him. In order that it might look "good," the last ball was a drop curve, aimed about two feet low. No man with any judgment, seeing that the ball was going to hit the plate itself, would have offered at it, but Joe Dorsey was a bad batter, and he swung. There was nothing for White to do but let the ball get away from him, and Dorsey hustled for first base.

White straightened up with the ball when Joe was almost on the sack, and slammed away, a wild, blind heave ten feet over Smiling Kelly's glove. The right fielder was taken entirely by surprise, and Dorsey went from first to third. In the grand stand they were beginning to call for three strike-outs—anything to keep that man on third base.

The fence-breaking Culpepper was next at bat. "Cul" hated a drop curve, but he could knock the cover off a straight ball, and that was what Eli offered him. Cul lined it back as straight as it had come. Eli stuck out his hand mechanically, the ball hit his glove and dropped dead at his feet.

It was a startling bit of fielding for the crowd, and a still more startling bit of fielding for Eli himself. And there was the ball at his feet, and Joe Dorsey was halfway between third and the plate. Eli made a snatch for the ball and dribbled it along the ground for ten feet. When he did pick it up, he whipped it to White like a bullet, but he was very careful to throw the ball shoulder-high, and as it thudded into the big catcher's mitt, Joe Dorsey slid over the plate low and safe. The crowd was stunned into silence. An error apiece for this wonderful pair—and a run for Bisbee. What was going to happen next?

They were not kept in suspense very long. Eli, thinking of the money, made up his mind that since the public idol had to have a clay foot, he might as well have a pair. Culpepper was on first base. Eli knew well that Smiling Kelly had a fatal weakness; a ball low down on his bare-hand side would get away from him, nine times out of ten. And, of course, that was why Eli tried to nab Culpeper off first base by throwing with all the strength in his arm low down and on the "meat-hand side." The ball went hopping to the bleachers, Culpepper went hopping to second base, and the Tucson crowd was hopping mad. Eli threw his glove on the ground and walked around in circles; White ran in as if to steady him, but what he said was:

"Give 'em another one, and then wind her up quick. Look at the clouds!"

Eli knew that Slattery, the next hitter, liked a ball high up under his shoulders, and high up it came. If Slattery

had put in a mail order for it, he could not have been better suited. Slattery knocked that free-will offering into center for a single, and Culpepper scored. Tucson was very sick. Delaney, on the bench, was desperate.

Then suddenly the Eli of blessed memory blossomed forth, just as if he had never been under an eclipse. He struck out two men with seven pitched balls, and the third one fouled into White's glove.

There was an ominous rumbling in the west as the teams changed sides, and an ominous grumbling in the grand stand. If Eli expected applause for locking the stable door after he had stolen the horse, he was disappointed.

"Come on, fellers, for pity's sake!" urged Delaney. "Don't let that greaser pitcher beat you! Mouse, you're due! You're *overdue!* Get out there and bust that egg in one! Bates, what for did you go and give that Slattery a high ball? He can't hit anything else! And, George, that was an awful throw to first. Seemed to me like you'd ought to have held the ball. But le's not holler about what has happened, fellows! We ain't licked yet!"

"One game guy!" whispered White between his teeth to Eli Bates. "It's too bad it has to be a good fellow like Pat!"

"Now, Mouse!" urged the manager once more, "take your time out there! Look 'em over! This greaser weakens after the sixth always. But whatever you do, *get down there!*"

Pete Moreno looked at the figure "2" on the scoreboard for the first half of the seventh, and it struck him that these Eagles were not so fierce, after all. Easy picking. Then Pete fell into the common error of those of his blood. He grew careless, tried to "show off" a new curve ball with which he had been experimenting, and Mouse walked, slightly reviving the hopes of the populace.

Smiling Kelly missed two mighty swings and then rolled one gently down the first-base line. Mouse McGhee reached second base, but the Tucson men knew that this was no time to play for single runs. It would take a cluster of three to win; two would save the bacon, and the rain was coming out of the west on the wings of a stiff wind.

Patsy Delaney wished that it was any other umpire in the country, so that his men might have "stalled" and delayed matters long enough to have the rain interfere, but Patsy had tried that game once with Silver Bill, and that honest individual had warned him twice, and then declared the game forfeited.

"Rule twenty-six, section four," said Silver Bill. "Look it up, Pat. I'm sorry, but the book says——"

And the worst of it was that Delaney knew that Silver Bill was just honest enough to do it again if he gave him the chance.

Kid Peters walked out, swinging his short black bludgeon.

"What shall I do, Pat?" he asked.

"Do your damndest!" said the manager desperately.

Kid Peters obeyed orders to the letter, for he fanned without so much as touching the ball, and Moreno grinned at his catcher. There was not a sound in the grand stand. The Tucson rooters had one eye on the diamond and one eye on the sullen masses of black clouds rolling up from the west. No need for some fool on the bleachers to yell: "Now, or never!" Without doubt, this would be the last full inning played; Mouse McGhee was waiting on second base, and "two hands were gone."

Moose Jones shut his eyes and took a crack at the first thing that resembled a baseball. Moose was not much of a hitter at best, but there are times when the man who swings blindly introduces the element of luck into a contest of skill. The ball dropped safe in short right field, but the Mouse had no chance to score. Third base was the best he could do, and the Moose stayed on first.

Oily Tom Blake, in the front row of the grand stand, scratched a cigar on his trousers and put a match in his mouth. He was not really worried; only anxious that Pete Moreno might be given strength according to his need. A long hit at this juncture would be

bad—very bad. And the rain was surely coming.

"Bingo" Bodie spent some time selecting his weapon, and he picked out the biggest and the heaviest bat he could find. Then he dug his spikes into the turf and addressed Pete Moreno.

"Come on, you yellow hammer!" he taunted. "You ain't game enough to stick one over! There never was a game guy in the whole Moreno family. Every one of 'em would quit! Stick it over! I dare you!"

Moreno grinned, for he was seasoned to pleasant conversation. He knew that Bodie was not a first-ball hitter, and that he did a great deal of talking.

On the bench Eli Bates looked at George White and shook his head.

"Not a chance in the world!" breathed the catcher. "This fellow will wait for two and then pop out. He hasn't had a hit in a month that went outside the diamond!"

Moreno confidently expected Bodie to wait for the first one, at any rate, and he cut loose his fast ball. To Moreno's disgust, Bingo swung as if he never expected to have another chance at a straight ball in his life. It was the kind of a wallop that makes every man in the grand stand grunt in sympathy. What was a great deal more important, Bingo Bodie hit that fast ball squarely on the trade-mark. Out in left field, Culpepper, of the Bisbee club, took a few flying steps, and then stopped to save his breath for profanity.

The ball sailed out against the background of black until it was no more than a tiny white speck floating in space, hung between heaven and earth for an instant, and then settled down gracefully beyond the fence—the longest home run ever seen in Arizona. And just as the white pinpoint was blotted out by the line of the fence, just as the three base runners were getting under way, just as four thousand wild men and women came up in a cheering wave, just as Tom Blake's new cigar slipped down inside his speckled waistcoat, the first great drops of rain began to whisper to the shingled roof.

There were three very sick men in that ball park, and two of them sat on the bench with the victorious Eagles.

"That'll be about all!" yelled Delaney, as he hugged Bodie in front of the bench. "Look at that rain coming!"

One of the sick men on the bench lifted up his voice querulously.

"You ain't afraid of a little rain, are you?" demanded Eli Bates. "We ain't sugar or salt, and we can go another inning before it gets too wet."

The manager looked at his star pitcher curiously.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked. "Ain't you satisfied to *win* this game? Look at that lightning! In three minutes this place will be afloat, and according to the rules——"

"Forget the rules!" snarled Eli, and paused as White's spikes bit through his shoe leather.

"Shut up!" hissed the catcher. "Want to start something?"

The bleacherites scrambled to cover, cheering as they ran, and in a heavy downpour the third man struck out and raced for the bench. As he ran, a jagged, blinding flash ripped across the blackness which hung over the field and the bottom fell out of the clouds.

Silver Bill Barrett was the last man to leave the diamond. Pausing an instant at the plate, he looked at his watch, and in a stentorian voice which sounded above the howling wind and the pelting rain, Silver Bill called time.

Oily Tom Blake seized the dripping umpire as he hoisted himself into the stand.

"It's called off, ain't it?" demanded the gambler anxiously. "It oughtn't to go unless they play the full nine innings!"

Silver Bill reached into his hip pocket and brought out a well-thumbed volume.

"Rule seventy-four, section one," he bellowed. "If it rains for half an hour, I have the power to terminate the game. Want to see the book?"

Oily Tom did not wish to see the book.

"But the bets?" he asked.

"They stand, of course!"

"Could they go on and finish the game in half an hour?" Tom was begging now.

"Say!" demanded the umpire suddenly, "which club have you been betting on? Finish the game! Man, this ain't no rain! This is a *flood!*"

Blake sat down, looked at his watch, examined the somber sky, but found no comfort there, looked at his watch again, and then settled down, chin on his chest, to the melancholy contemplation of the diamond, fast being turned into a lake. He was working out a sum in mental arithmetic, and the result caused him to wince as if in pain.

Silver Bill watched the gambler out of the corner of his eye. He also was working out a little problem of his own. Over in one corner of the stand the victorious Eagles were holding an informal reception, and Silver Bill Barrett noticed the fact that Eli Bates, the incomparable one, was not celebrating with his fellows. He sat apart, staring out on the field.

Silver Bill was no Sherlock Holmes, but he could put two and two together as well as the next man.

Darkness was settling down over the city. The storm had spent itself, though in the distance the lightning winked and the thunder muttered. Two men were picking their way down a side street which led to the railroad yards.

"Well, Jake," said the red-headed one, "you've got a great business head. I've got to hand it to you!"

"That's right!" snarled the man addressed as Jake. "Blame *me* for it! I made it rain, I suppose!"

A man came running after them, splashing through the puddles.

"All hell's loose!" he panted. "Everybody in town is onto us! They got Mayhew soused and he gave up! They'll tar and feather you both!"

Jake and the red-headed one looked at each other with bulging eyes.

"Tar and feathers!" said Eli Bates. "This is *no* place for a minister's son!"

"That's what I get," panted Blake, "for listening to a pair of cheap crooks like you! I've got to jump the town, and I lose six thousand bucks!"

Over in the railroad yard a heavy freight engine began to cough hoarsely, and a long string of empty cars clanked into motion. Red Lynch looked at Jake Hartwell and then at the freight train. Then both looked at Tom Blake.

"What do I get for my six thousand?" demanded the gambler bitterly.

"I guess we'll have to give you a rain check for it," said Lynch. "Come to think of it, we owe you something for letting this story get out."

Hartwell looked at the moving cars and measured distance and speed with a practiced eye. Then he nodded at Lynch.

"A rain check and a receipt!" said the redhead.

And the next thing Tom Blake knew he was picking himself out of a mud puddle with a lump on his jaw the size of a turkey egg. Red Lynch could do more than pitch baseball with that right arm of his.

Some time later, bedded down for the night on the jolting floor of an empty furniture car, Red Lynch thought of something.

"Oh, Jake! Asleep?"

Hartwell grunted savagely.

"Jake, when I was a kid, I had a copy book, and there was a line in it that said 'Honesty is the best policy.'"

"Well?"

"Oh, nothing," said Lynch, grinning into the dark, "but I guess that goes—in baseball, anyway!"

THE WHITEST THING IN CINCINNATI

Charles P. Taft, the President's brother, has a long, snowy beard which is the whitest thing in Cincinnati. The mystery of the thing is how he manages to keep it white in such a smoky town.

The Scarred Face

By J. Kenilworth Egerton

Author of "The Passive Strike," "The Web of the Camorra," Etc.

It took a long series of investigations in Italy and the Italian quarter of New York to equip Mr. Egerton for the writing of these stories of the Black Hand, or *Mano Nera*, that mysterious association of Italian criminals which operates with as seeming impunity under the very noses of the American police as does the Camorra of Naples or the Mafia of Sicily by the grace of the Italian laxity of supervision. His revelations are amazing, almost incredible.

(*A Two-part Story—Part I*)

WITH a contemptuous smile on his lips, Strickland tossed the letter aside, and, propping his morning paper against a water bottle, proceeded, as was his wont, to glance over the news of the day. It was not one of the so-called yellow journals which exaggerated trifles into sensations by the employment of striking headlines; but even the most conservative of modern newspapers features prominently a big story, and his coffee cup halted midway between the table and his lips as he noted the double leads which extended over a double column.

There was nothing in the story itself which would ordinarily have caused him to give it a second thought; but it seemed a curious coincidence that it should have been the item to catch his eye after reading that letter which had come on the first delivery.

The story was of the persistent and successful blackmailing of one of the famous singers at the Metropolitan Opera House by his Italian countrymen operating under the name of the Black Hand, and Strickland gave a little whistle of astonishment as he read of the tremendous sums which the tenor confessed to having paid as tribute before he mustered up sufficient courage to apply to the American police for protection.

He read the story through, marveling at the cowardice which had made the singer such an easy victim for the blackmailers; but it was significant that before turning to the financial page, which was usually to him the most interesting portion of his morning paper, he reached out, and, taking up the discarded letter, gave it a more careful reading.

At the bottom of the written page were exactly such signs and symbols as were reproduced in the newspaper story's description of the threatening letters which the singer had received; but the text of the letter was in English.

Threatening and crank leters were no novelty to Strickland, although his private secretary usually disposed of those which came to the office without bringing them to his attention; but this was unlike anything which he had ever received before. In the first place, it contained no demand for assistance and made no complaint of wrong done. There was no definite threat, aside from the heading, the behest printed in brilliant red ink to "Read and Tremble." Following that was a simple statement that between the time of the post-

ing and the receipt of the letter all of the buildings on his stock farm in Kentucky would be destroyed by fire.

At the bottom were the symbols which the newspaper story had declared to be the signs manual of the Black Hand, or *Mano Nera,* that mysterious association of Italian criminals which operates with as seeming impunity under the very noses of the American police as does the Camorra of Naples or the Mafia of Sicily by the grace of the Italian laxity of supervision—the skull and crossbones, the open coffin, the crossed daggers, and, lest doubt might remain as to its origin, the crudely drawn black hand!

It was a puzzling epistle. It assigned no reason for its being; there was nothing beyond the simple statement, but the wording of that caused Strickland to examine more carefully the envelope which had contained it. The postmark was perfectly legible, and showed that it had been mailed at the general post office at nine the previous evening, too late to catch the last night delivery and in time to insure its reaching its destination on the first the following morning.

Strickland studied both letter and envelope closely; but though he read and reread the latter he did not tremble. Had it contained a definite threat he would probably have dismissed it promptly from his mind; but there was just enough suggestion of hidden mystery in it to excite his curiosity, and—although he did not acknowledge it to himself—give him a decided feeling of uneasiness.

There was one comforting reflection, however. At ten o'clock the night before he had received a telegram from Dangerfield, his farm manager, telling him of the shipment of his two-year-olds to the East, and that telegram, although it had been sent after the mailing of the letter, gave no hint of anything wrong at the establishment.

In so far as he could, he dismissed it from his thoughts, and turned to the neglected financial news, finding great comfort in the report of the favorable progress of a delicate bit of stock manipulation which he was engineering and which promised to add materially to his already considerable accumulation of millions.

He had so far recovered his equanimity by the time he reached Nassau Street that he entered his office with his usual cheery "Good morning" to his employees; but a presentiment of evil came to him as Lucas, his confidential secretary, rose quickly from the desk at which he was sorting the large accumulation of morning mail. The wildest fluctuations of the stock market, where Strickland's money was habitually busy, never caused a flicker of anxiety on that young man's imperturbable face, which was ordinarily as expressionless as a graven image; but there was a look of concern in his eyes as he picked up a yellow telegraph form from the desk in front of him.

"I tried to get you on the phone, but you had left the house, Mr. Strickland," he said. "I have a piece of bad news here, and——"

"Not from Mrs. Strickland?" interrupted Strickland anxiously.

A faint smile came to Lucas' lips as he shook his head.

"No, nothing but good news from her; a cable from Gibraltar saying that she was having a pleasant voyage, with an agreeable passenger list, and anticipating safe arrival here," he answered. "This concerns your next most precious possession, sir; it is from Dangerfield, and——"

"Was there any loss of life?" gasped Strickland, interrupting Lucas' well-meant efforts to break disagreeable news gently. His secretary looked at him in astonishment.

"You had already heard of it?" he exclaimed, in turn.

"Perhaps. Tell me what it is—all of it!" exclaimed Strickland impatiently; and, still wondering, Lucas read out the contents of the telegram:

"Nine buildings at farm burned at midnight. Fires started simultaneously, and undoubtedly of incendiary origin. Brood mares and foals in paddocks uninjured, but unable to get stallions and horses in training from the stables. Five colored stableboys who slept over harness room missing. Sher-

iff has started investigation, but can find nothing to go on. Buildings fully covered by insurance; but contents not. Wire instructions. DANGERFIELD."

"That is all we know about it here at the office, Mr. Strickland," continued Lucas, replacing the telegram on the desk, and his tone implied that he believed his employer to have further information.

Strickland drew the mysterious letter of warning from his pocket and took it from the envelope.

"And it's the first definite information I have had; but, as you suspected, I was not entirely unprepared for it," he said. "See here, Lucas; do you know anything about the Black Hand?"

"It's part of my duties to read the newspapers, Mr. Strickland," replied Lucas. "Hardly a day passes without some reference to that organization's doings, and by a curious chance I happen to know a little more, perhaps, about it than the ordinary reader."

"Humph! There isn't much curious chance about your peculiar faculty for obtaining inside information concerning things which most people know nothing about," said Strickland, as he glanced again over the contents of the letter. "That's one of the items which makes your services valuable to me, Lucas, and if you can make head or tail out of this I'll conclude that you are worth a raise of salary."

The secretary took the letter and read it carefully, and Strickland watched him as he studied over it and examined the envelope.

"I'm afraid I can't see that raise in sight at the moment, for you have undoubtedly noticed all that I have discovered," said Lucas, when he had finished. "It was evidently posted before midnight, and Dangerfield's telegram testifies that its prophecy of evil was fulfilled."

"Well, what's the answer?" demanded Strickland irritably.

Lucas shook his head.

"You can search me. On the face of it, it looks like a piece of gratuitous deviltry," he answered. "When the buildings at the Bonanza shaft were dynamited we knew where we were at; it was a piece of retaliation for your refusal of the union's demand that the mine should be made a 'closed shop.' You haven't received a touch from these dagos before the receipt of this letter?"

"Not unless you have tossed it in the wastebasket here," answered Strickland. "That's the thing which has puzzled me about it."

"It's enough to puzzle any one," agreed Lucas. "Do you want me to do anything about it—turn the matter over to the police or one of the private agencies?"

"What have you got up your sleeve, Lucas?" questioned Strickland; for something in his employee's tone made him suspicious. "Have you been keeping anything back from me on this business?"

"Not a thing, sir; I knew nothing about it until this telegram came, and had not the slightest suspicion of anything back of it until you showed me the letter. Now I don't care to take any action in the matter without your sanction."

"And if I told you to go ahead and use your own judgment, just what would you do?" asked Strickland, still suspicious that Lucas had not been entirely frank with him.

"Just what I always do when you need information which I can't supply—go to the man who is best qualified to furnish it," replied Lucas. "We are all at sea on this, Mr. Strickland; the Black Hand is a new proposition in this office."

"Who's your man?" demanded Strickland bluntly.

"His name is Winthrop Clifford, but I don't suppose that means anything to you," answered the secretary. "I have reason to believe that he knows more about this sort of thing than any one else in New York, and I think he could put us wise to the real meaning of it."

Strickland busied himself for a moment with pencil and paper.

"Including St. Elmo and the five other stallions, the loss foots up to close on a half million; but it's not the money I'm sore about," he said grimly, when

he had finished his calculations. "The loss of the horses in training practically cuts me off from everything but two-year-old racing this year, and I had the Brooklyn Handicap cinched and a good look in for the Suburban. You get hold of this man Clifford and tell him that I'll pay ten thousand apiece for the scalps of the men who did this job, and a bonus of fifty thousand if he lands the bunch, big and little."

"I'll do my best, Mr. Strickland, though I haven't seen Clifford in six months," answered Lucas.

The subject was dropped, and Strickland took up the routine business of the office. He was not entirely easy in his mind, however. Tangled up with the mass of figures which he was forced to consider, and obtruding through the intricate business details which demanded his closest personal attention, there was an ever-present memory of that hideous blackened hand which had been drawn at the foot of the letter he had received that morning.

"I've got pretty nearly enough on hand just now without this last complication," he grumbled, as he pushed away the result of his morning's work at luncheon time. "That B. & S. A. deal will be closed up this afternoon and we've made old Prendergast and his bunch of highbinders sweat blood, all right, Lucas. I must get down to Honduras as soon as I can and straighten out that revolution tangle or our banana plantations will be ruined. Let's see; Friday I have got to appear before that confounded senatorial committee in Washington, and Mrs. Strickland is due to arrive on Saturday. We should be able to get away the following week, so you had better tell Jackson to take the *Gilda* to New Orleans and wait for us there. What have you done about this man Clifford?"

"Located him—about three hundred miles this side of Gibraltar, unfortunately," answered Lucas ruefully. "He has been in Europe for some time, and is returning on the *Roagna*, the same steamer that Mrs. Strickland is on. Shall we wait for him, or turn this matter over to the police?"

"My son, when I turn over a piece of business to you I don't intend to interfere in your management of it," answered Strickland, as he rose from his chair. "I'll be glad to know how you are getting on, and if you think your personal investigation will do any good before Clifford arrives here you are at liberty to go out to Kentucky. I'm going to lunch with Prendergast and hear him squeal a little now. I'll drop this Black Hand business until you have progress to report. I'm taking your say-so that Clifford is the man you want, and just remember that the *Roagna* has a thousand-mile radius to her Marconi.

"There's a lot of coincidence about this business. The first thing I noticed in the paper this morning after receiving that letter was the account of the blackmailing of that opera singer by the Black Hand. I was just congratulating myself that Mrs. Strickland had left the native land of that gang and was on her way home when you tell me that this man Clifford is a passenger on the same steamer. I hope it doesn't mean any ill luck to her, Lucas. You were right when you said that the stock farm and racing stud was my second most valuable possession, and you know me well enough to understand what is the first. You might just file a wireless telling her to be careful. It is possible that they can relay it, if the *Roagna* is out of communication with land. This business seems to have made me apprehensive."

"It's sure given the old boy the jumps, and that's something I've never known anything else to do," said Lucas to himself as the door closed behind his employer's back.

Then, clearing away the business matters which needed his immediate attention, he prepared to leave for Kentucky to follow Strickland's suggestion and make a personal investigation.

No one had ever suspected Joseph Strickland of cowardice. The operations by which he had developed a small capital into a fortune of millions had required courage and audacity. He had fought the powerful Miners' Union to a standstill on his Western properties;

and had never lost a night's sleep during that bitter struggle. His Wall Street ventures, even when he was a newcomer, had astonished some of the most reckless veterans in the game by their boldness, and his efforts in trust formation had succeeded largely because he was willing to risk everything he had to back his opinion.

He had a reputation as a hard fighter, a sturdy friend, and a relentless enemy, and his success in money-getting was only rivaled by his generosity in spending. His racing stable was one of the finest in the country, his yacht, the *Gilda,* was a marvel of luxurious marine architecture, and nothing which money could buy had ever been denied to Gilda Goldsmith after she left the realm of musical comedy to preside over his home on upper Fifth Avenue.

Nevertheless, the mysterious letter of warning which had predicted the loss of his farm buildings and equipment worried him, and caused an apprehension which was new to him. For the first time in his life he knew restless nights, and his constant string of telegrams to Lucas clearly indicated to that shrewd young man that the affair was getting under his skin. They caused Lucas to curtail his investigations in Kentucky and hasten his return to New York, and hardly had he seated himself at his desk when his employer entered, a full half hour ahead of his customary time. He was haggard and pale of face, and Lucas hardly recognized his voice when he spoke.

"Well, you have news which will confirm this, I suppose?" he said, as with a shaking hand he held out a letter.

Lucas looked at him solicitously as he took it.

"I haven't had a chance to look things over yet; I have just this minute arrived," he answered, pointing significantly to a little pile of unopened telegrams on his desk.

"I can guess what one of them will tell you; but never mind that now—read the letter!" exclaimed Strickland impatiently.

Lucas drew from the envelope a sheet of paper identical with that of the first letter of warning, and he could not restrain an exclamation of astonishment as he glanced at it. The heading was identical with the other, as were the symbols at the bottom of the page. Like it, too, it contained no demand for tribute; but the simple statement that between its mailing and delivery Strickland's yacht, *Gilda,* would be destroyed. He read it hastily, and, throwing it aside, picked up the unopened telegrams, promptly dropping the first two which pertained to matters of routine business.

"By thunder, here it is, Mr. Strickland!" he exclaimed excitedly, as he glanced at the third. "Listen:

"Yacht *Gilda* sank at her moorings in New Orleans harbor at midnight, following an explosion in the hold. Cause of explosion unknown, but believed to have been in forward port coal bunker. Sank in three minutes after explosion, and lies on port side in eight fathoms of water. Probably total loss. Second engineer, two stokers, and two cabin stewards missing. Have notified underwriters. Wire instructions.

"JACKSON, Captain."

Strickland looked at him helplessly when he concluded.

"I knew that would be about it when I received that cursed letter this morning," he said bitterly. "I'll save you the trouble of comparison; the envelope is just like the first. The postmark shows that it was mailed at nine last night, and the postman brought it on his first round this morning. They mean business, all right."

"Business! What kind of business?" asked Lucas savagely. "I could understand it if there was any demand for payment. I half suspected when I left here for Kentucky that this was a hoax; that the missing negro stableboys were really responsible for the fires at the farm. I lost that idea quickly enough. They were just recovering what was left of them from the ruins when I arrived there. The poor little chaps had been roasted alive in their bunks."

Strickland shuddered and turned away his head.

"And now five lives lost with the yacht!" he groaned. "The money loss is nothing, after all. It will foot up a million; but I'd have given that rather

than have them sacrificed. Did you accomplish anything at all at the farm, Lucas?"

"Mighty little, I'm sorry to say," answered the secretary regretfully. "I discovered the print of a hand in black on the gatepost at the entrance; but as near as I could find out there wasn't a single dago within a dozen miles. There is a construction gang of them working on the spur of the L. & N. which is pushing up there, and they are camped about fifteen miles from the farm, but none of them has been seen away from the camp nor in the vicinity of the place. The Italians haven't invaded the Blue Grass country. Dangerfield and the sheriff had done everything possible to discover the incendiaries; but I didn't dare to suggest the Black Hand to them. They would have either laughed at me or those Blue Grass farmers would have moved over and cleaned out the whole Italian colony. On the off-chance I stopped over long enough in Cincinatti to put Shackleton's people on the job. I didn't say anything about the receipt of this letter of warning; but told Shackleton that we had reason to suspect that the incendiaries were Italians, and he has sent some of his sleuths to the camp and is working in the local Italian colony. Shall I put them on this yacht case?"

"How about your man Clifford?" asked Strickland abruptly.

"He's still on the *Roagna,* I hope," answered Lucas, smiling. "I don't see anything to be gained by stirring him up by wireless. We have five days more to wait for him; but from the meager results which the police have obtained in dealing with the Black Hand conspirators I don't believe it is worth while to do anything at headquarters. We should be overrun with detectives who wouldn't accomplish anything and simply——"

Strickland interrupted him with a gesture, and started a restless pacing back and forth.

"Five days! You talk of that as if it were nothing; but it will be five eternities of anxiety for me!" he exclaimed. "Now that this second communication has come I have the feeling that others will follow closely on its heels. I shall be afraid to go to bed at night to face the hours of torment until the mail delivery and——"

"Hold on, Mr. Strickland; you are letting this thing buffalo you before they get down to real business," said Lucas soothingly. "I'll admit that we are helpless for the moment; but the time will come when they will make a demand and then it will be our turn. It won't be the first attempt to blackmail you, and you know how much satisfaction anybody has ever received out of that game. You have put this thing into my hands and I'll get 'em, sooner or later. If you will take my tip you will just saw wood at your regular business and not let on that you are bothered."

Strickland's restless pacing ceased abruptly and his jaw set.

"You are right, Lucas," he said, as he sat down at his desk. "I am getting into the condition where I lie awake half the night waiting for the postman's whistle and then jump ten feet when I hear it. I've always found hard work the best cure for nervousness and I've got enough of that ahead of me. There's that confounded senatorial investigation for one thing. We'll have to go over all the figures of the Refrigerator Trust organization; that's what they are after me for. The B. & S. A. deal is entirely wound up, and we can credit a million and a half on the right side of the ledger. Oh, by the way! I want you to get me fifteen one-thousand-dollar bills. Draw my personal check for it; I don't care to have it go through the office books."

Lucas waited for a moment before assenting. Curiosity was one of his failings, and he hoped for an explanation of so unusual an order; but none was forthcoming, and although he was very fully in Strickland's confidence he knew him too well to ask a direct question unless information was volunteered. Strickland, however, kept his own counsel, and, following his secretary's advice, sought forgetfulness of his anxiety in the mental application necessary to prepare his testimony before the sena-

torial committee which was prying into the matter of the trust formation in which he had made a large portion of his fortune.

Small as that amount seemed by comparison with the sums which Lucas handled in Strickland's Wall Street operations, it bothered the secretary more than the routine business which he fully understood. Like most very wealthy men, Strickland rarely carried more than necessary pocket money in ready cash, and even his bridge and poker losses at the club were usually settled by check.

Lucas' prominent bump of curiosity fairly ached when his employer placed the packet of bills in his pocket without comment; but he was a shrewd young man and wise to many ways of the wicked city, and he smiled knowingly to himself when Strickland's parting remark to him suggested a possible use for the money.

"I think I'm about ready for the senatorial probe now," he said, as he locked the papers which he had been studying away in a private drawer of his desk. "It is unfortunate that I shall be detained in Washington when Mrs. Strickland arrives; but I'll leave you here to look out for her. I'll send the car back from Washington, and she will join me there as soon as she gets rested. I'm dining at the Plaza Club to-night, Lucas, if anything turns up before midnight."

"And I'll bet a nice red apple that the fifteen thousand goes to pay for consolation the old boy has received during his wife's long absence in Italy," said the secretary to himself so confidently that the ache almost disappeared from the curiosity protuberance.

II.

"Trenton, this promises to be about the biggest case that I've ever been called upon to handle," said Inspector Cromwell, chief of the New York detective bureau, to the district attorney, who had answered his urgent summons for consultation by a personal appearance at his office.

"Have you traced it to the Black Hand already?" asked Trenton half jocularly.

"No, thank Heaven! so there will be no occasion to mourn the absence of your white-haired boy, Winthrop Clifford," retorted Cromwell, with just a suggestion of irritation in his voice.

"The mourning wouldn't be a long one, at any rate; for I received a wireless from him last night telling me he would arrive on the *Roagna* this morning," said the district attorney, grinning at his success in having taken a rise out of the inspector. "What about this present case, though, Cromwell, which makes the murder of an obscure club waiter of so much importance?"

"The obscurity of the victim doesn't cut any ice, one way or another; but the prominence of the people who are mixed up in the case does," replied Cromwell seriously. "You know Joseph Strickland, of course?"

"Personally only slightly; by reputation very well. Surely you do not attach any particular importance to the fact that this man Wheaton's body was found on his doorstep!"

"Only in connection with several other circumstances," answered Cromwell grimly.

Trenton looked at him incredulously.

"Great Scott, man; you do not accuse him of the murder!" he exclaimed.

"I'm not ready to make a definite accusation against any one just yet; but I'll tell you right here that if I found half as many suspicious circumstances pointing to a resident of Hell's Kitchen or a guest at a Bowery lodging house he would have been behind the bars before now," said Cromwell. "We can't handle a shining light in the financial world quite as unceremoniously as we do the ordinary run of lawbreakers; but I've got Strickland shadowed, and he won't be out from under our observation until we are convinced of his innocence or you tell me that I have enough evidence to enable you to indict him. I gathered in his confidential secretary, Lucas, this morning."

"That's as good as a notice to Strickland, if he has a guilty conscience," re-

marked Trenton dryly. "Go ahead, Cromwell; you had better put me wise to the whole business. Strickland isn't the kind of a man for a police inspector who wants to keep his job to fool with, and I'd hate to see you doing patrol duty in wildest Staten Island as the result of pipe dreaming. Strickland has a pretty good pull, you know, and the reputation of never forgetting an injury."

"I'm not acting on a pipe dream, and if I hadn't been afraid that his wealth and the pull you speak of would have cleared him I would have pinched him before this," answered the inspector confidently. "I haven't made any charge against Lucas; I simply locked him up as a 'suspicious person,' and I can hold him for twenty-four hours without showing my hand. Strickland left last night for Washington. He is to testify before a senatorial committee to-day, and try to conceal from it what he knows about the formation of the Refrigerator Trust. Two of my best men traveled over there with him, and they won't lose sight of him."

Trenton made a gesture of impatience.

"Confound it, I am willing to take it for granted that you have been conscientious in your folly; but I want to know what has led you into it!" he exclaimed. "Let's have the facts, Cromwell."

"You know the first of them: That at two o'clock yesterday morning the body of a man with a knife between his shoulder blades was found on the steps of Strickland's house on upper Fifth Avenue," said Cromwell, and Trenton nodded assent. "It was discovered by Daly, the patrolman on that beat. Only a half hour or so before, he had met Strickland at the corner and said good night to him; so, supposing that the household had not yet retired, he rang the bell to ask some one to telephone to the station house. Strickland himself answered the ring, fully dressed. Daly tells me that he acted like a crazy man at the sight of the body, and paid no attention to his request until he had spent a good ten minutes in getting this young fellow Lucas on the wire. Then Daly himself sent in the call for the wagon, and after the body had been removed he remained on post until he was relieved at four. He watched the house, and he says that he saw the shadow of Strickland come and go on the shades of the library, the front room on the second floor, as if he were pacing it like a caged animal. Lucas had arrived just after the body was removed, and was evidently in consultation with him. Daly was relieved by a patrolman named Regan, and he reports that the pacing kept up until daylight. Then, about half-past seven, both Strickland and Lucas came to the door and seemed to be watching anxiously for some one's arrival. Finally, when the postman came around the corner on his first round, Lucas ran to meet him and, taking Strickland's mail for him, ran back to the house. They both went inside, and Regan saw the shades in the library raised. A short time afterward Strickland left the house."

"He evidently didn't run away, since you know where he is," commented Trenton.

"No, he didn't run away; but he kept blame well out of sight all day," continued Cromwell. "It didn't take us long to identify the murdered man. His name was Wheaton, an inoffensive old chap who had been a waiter at the Plaza Club for the past five years. You know the membership of that organization; it is supposed that a man must have several millions to be eligible. Strickland qualified, all right. He was one of the most prominent members, and incidentally he dined there night before last.

"And I suppose that Wheaton waited on him, spilled a drop of soup on his shirt front, and was stabbed in the back for it!" said Trenton, with an aggravating grin.

"You hold on a minute and I'll tell you something more improbable than that," retorted Cromwell impatiently. "Wheaton did wait on him, as it happens; I suppose efficiently. He did more than that. Strickland played bridge until after midnight, and, although Wheaton had gone off watch at

twelve, he remained in the club. He was talking with the boy in the coat-room when Strickland came downstairs, and said a few words to the millionaire as he helped him on with his coat. I don't know what he said; but I do know that Strickland answered him very gruffly. Strickland went out of the front door and walked home; Wheaton left a few minutes later by the servants' door, and within an hour his body was found on Strickland's doorstep with this knife in his heart."

He held up a vicious-looking dagger which had been concealed by a pile of papers on the desk; but Trenton drew back from it with a shudder as he saw that it was covered with dark-brown stains.

"You should be too old a hand at this kind of business to weaken at the sight of a little blood, and this dagger is well worth examination," said Cromwell encouragingly. "I had never seen one like it outside of a museum. The handle and blade are fashioned from one piece of steel; the former elaborately carved by hand, the latter so exquisitely tempered that it has taken a needle point and a razor edge. I spotted it for something rare and old, and at once submitted it to a couple of antiquity sharps. They both recognized it at sight; it is a fine example of the Italian armorer's work, and the chiseling of the handle is attributed to no less an artist than Benvenuto Cellini. It brought three thousand dollars when it was sold with the colection of Prince Rospigliosi, in Rome, three years ago."

"And the purchaser?" asked Trenton eagerly, all pretense of indifference lost.

"Was Mrs. Joseph Strickland, who presented it to her husband to add to his already valuable collection of antique arms and armor!" exclaimed Cromwell triumphantly. "That colection is kept at Strickland's house, Trenton; it is one of his pet hobbies, and he employs an expert to come and look it over regularly. That man has told me that he saw the dagger there on the afternoon before the murder was committed, and that he can't be mistaken because he cleaned it himself and put it back in its place. Take it all in all, there's a pretty fair chain of circumstantial evidence to start with, Mr. District Attorney. Strickland is the last known person to have spoken with Wheaton. He was evidently annoyed by their brief conversation. An hour later Wheaton is found dead on the doorstep of the house which Strickland occupies, and has just entered, and the knife which was used to kill him is one of Strickland's most carefully guarded possessions."

"But there must be more than that to justify even the detention of Lucas, Cromwell," said Trenton warningly. "I hope that you haven't let the old police habit of forming a theory and then making facts fit into it get you into this."

"I've hardly had time to formulate a theory at all; the facts have come to light with such astonishing rapidity that it is startling," protested the inspector. "I'll admit that fortune favored me; for I happened to be carrying on a little investigation at the Plaza Club which saved a lot of preliminary work. You remember that case where I was able to help old Colonel Prendergast out of a hole and save a lot of publicity which would have been annoying?"

"When his old-maid daughter threatened to marry the footman?"

"Yes, whom I recognized as 'Smooth-bore George,' the confidence man, and chased out of town," answered Cromwell, smiling. "Well, the old boy has proved his gratitude a good many times since by giving me tips on which I have made a little money in the Street, and about three weeks ago he called on me again. It seems that he and a few of his friends had framed up a scheme of consolidation of a lot of railway properties which were individually almost worthless, but which, combined, would give them practically a through line from Chicago to the Gulf. They set about it very quietly, and succeeded in getting pretty nearly everything they wanted at their own price.

"The details are not essential, and I won't go into them; but there was one small piece of line which *was* absolutely essential to their scheme. It had been bankrupt so long that they expected to

get it for a song; but after they had a lot of money tied up in stuff which would be worthless without it, they found that there was mighty little of the stock to be had. Strickland had found out about their scheme, quietly anticipated them, and had a majority of the stock safely locked up in his safe. He used it to sandbag them out of a million and a half in cold cash and a slice of the prospective profits.

"They had to give up; but they felt mighty sore about it, and Strickland wouldn't tell them who put him wise to their scheme. Each one of the syndicate swore that he hadn't leaked, and vouched for the honesty of his employees; but old Prendergast—who was most heavily involved—was the sorest of the lot, and swore that he would run down the traitor and have his scalp. He appealed to me to help him out, and I did my best.

"I could find no evidence which suggested that any one of the syndicate had proved a traitor, and their confidential office people seemed to be straight. I was informed that the final details of the scheme had been discussed and settled at a dinner in a private room at the Plaza Club, of which most of the syndicate members were present, and I suspected that the leak would be found there. On Prendergast's recommendation the steward employed one of my men as his assistant there, and I soon became convinced of it. Wheaton had been the head waiter at that dinner, and he always waited upon Strickland, who takes many of his dinners there during his wife's absence. I discovered that Wheaton had been dickering for a little place down on Long Island, and the day before his death he closed the deal, paying over eight thousand dollars in cash; rather a tidy sum for a club waiter to be carrying around in one-thousand-dollar bills."

"Go on; I'm beginning to catch on; but I don't quite read a murder motive yet," said Trenton, when the inspector paused.

"I think you will before I have finished," continued Cromwell grimly. "On searching the body at the station house they found six more bills of the same denomination and about seven hundred dollars in smaller ones. Taking the two amounts together, I figured out that Wheaton had received from some one a payment of fifteen thousand, and the large denomination of the bills made them easy to trace. Those identical bills had been given to Lucas by Strickland's banker the day before the murder, in payment of one of Strickland's personal checks.

"I had all of that information before noon, and tried to locate Strickland to ask if he had any explanation to offer. Lucas had remained in charge of things at the house, and he is about the slickest proposition in the way of a staller that I've run across in many a day. What he didn't know about Strickland's whereabouts would fill a book; but he volunteered his willingness to supply any information we might want, and claimed to be thoroughly conversant with his employer's affairs. Perhaps he is; but he couldn't help us out any about that fifteen thousand. He acknowledged having drawn such a sum from the bank and said that he had given it to Strickland; but added he didn't know what disposition Strickland had made of it.

"Strickland never came near the house yesterday; but I learned that he had ordered his private car attached to the seven-o'clock express for Washington, and had it watched. Sure enough, he turned up at the station just before train time, and as I knew the nature of the business which was taking him over there I made no effort to detain him. I had Lucas watched at the house, and tapped the telephone wire. He got into communication with Strickland early this morning, and I heard enough to convince me that they both knew more about the murder than they were willing to let on. A large part of their talk was so much gibberish to me; but I made up my mind that Lucas would be more apt to answer straight after a little touch of a cell, so I had him brought in."

Trenton shook his head in very evident disapproval. "Have you questioned him yet?" he asked.

Cromwell smiled as he spread out a sheet of letter paper on the desk.

"Not yet; I'll let him cool off a little," he answered. "He was pretty hot about his arrest; but you know how much attention we pay to that here. We shook him down before we locked him up, and this is one of the papers we found in his pocket. It isn't bad for an amateur effort; but we have seen too much of the real thing to be fooled by it. Just look it over."

Trenton took the letter, and gave an exclamation of astonishment as his eye caught the familiar symbols of the Black Hand at the bottom of the page; at the top, printed in large letters in red ink, was the injunction to "READ AND TREMBLE!" and between, the following text:

This is our third communication to you, and you have had convincing demonstration of the truth of the prophecies which the others contained. We commend your discretion in refraining from communicating with the police, who are powerless to harm us; but whose attentions might have proved troublesome to you. If you are wise, you will continue to keep your own counsel. For the third time, we venture upon a prophecy: Between the posting and the receipt of this letter a man will die on upper Fifth Avenue, in the immediate vicinity of your residence. His identity we do not yet know, and it is to us a matter of indifference whether it be a millionaire or a pauper whose death furnishes to you an evidence of our power. You have seen that our arm is a long one, and *la Mano Nera* strikes surely and relentlessly in the farthest corners of the earth. REMEMBER!

The district attorney looked up with a questioning expression in his eyes; and Cromwell smiled as he pointed to the letter.

"I told you that it wasn't a bad effort for an amateur; what do you think of it?" he asked.

"That it is near enough the truth and the real thing to be genuine," answered Trenton. "I thought that you told me the Black Hand wasn't in on this, Cromwell."

"I did, and if that communication came from the organization I'll eat it," replied the inspector. "See here, Trenton; these symbols signed to it are exact reproductions of those which were signed to the threatening letters which Crevosi, the Italian tenor, received."

"Which does not make them less convincing to me, as there was not the slightest doubt as to the genuineness of those."

"That's true; but you may remember that, contrary to our general rule, we permitted the newspapers to photograph those letters after we had pinched the men who sent them while they were waiting for Cervosi's tribute," said Cromwell. "A half dozen of them reproduced them, and in a drawer of Strickland's library desk we found the best of those reproductions carefully preserved. More than that, Trenton—in that same drawer is a plentiful supply of paper identical with this sheet, and on the desk is a double ink stand with wells of the best quality of blue-black and red ink. You can see that this letter is written with blue-black; it has hardly had time to turn dark yet."

"You believe that Lucas wrote this letter himself?"

"I believe that this letter was written in Strickland's library, and after and not before Wheaton was knifed," answered Cromwell confidently. "See here, Trenton; a little while ago you accused me of forming a theory and then making the facts fit it. Supposing I had formed no theory at all; wouldn't the facts which I have told you justify me in setting about it now?"

"Try it, and I'll tell you," answered Trenton cautiously.

"Then I'll soon know whether you think I've got enough for you to go to the grand jury with," said Cromwell, leaning forward on his desk. "In the first place, I was convinced that Wheaton was the man who supplied Strickland with the information which enabled him to get the strangle hold on old Prendergast's consolidation scheme. Now, I happen to know that one of his club acquaintances stopped at his table and chaffed him about it that last night he dined there, stating, in Wheaton's hearing, the amount which Strickland was supposed to have made out of the deal—fifteen hundred thousand dollars in cash and a future rake-off.

"Until then Wheaton probably thought that he had been generously paid; for fifteen thousand must have represented a fortune to him. But that day he had paid out over half of it for his property, and the improvements which he had planned to make on it would eat up most of the rest. It's the one best bet that he turned the thing over in his mind and then hung around the club to make another touch. Something—probably this congressional investigation—has been worrying Strickland like the deuce lately. Every one at the club has noticed it. He has looked haggard, and has been so touchy and irritable that he wasn't as warmly welcomed at the bridge table as usual.

"He has had two pretty bad jolts in the past few days; first the buildings on his stud farm in Kentucky were destroyed by fire, and he lost some valuable race horses. Almost on top of that his yacht, the *Gilda,* burst her boiler and went down in the harbor of New Orleans. Then this revolution down in Honduras threatens the banana industry, in which he is heavily interested, so that altogether he wasn't exactly in the frame of mind to listen patiently to Wheaton's demand for money. My guess is that he told him to go to a warmer place when he was tackled in the club lobby; but Wheaton didn't have sense enough to take that for an answer, and followed him to his home to repeat it, with the possible addition of a threat—and Strickland was not a safe man to threaten at any time. He would fight at the drop of the hat."

"There's a big difference between that and murder," suggested Trenton.

"And there's a big difference between Strickland in his normal condition and Strickland in the frame of mind he has been in for the past few days," argued Cromwell. "Of course, this is negative, Trenton; for it is what Daly *did not* see; but it is not without value. He was close to Strickland's house at the time the murder must have been committed; but he heard no outcry nor sound of a scuffle. He saw no one running away, and at that time of night, in that quiet neighborhood, a rapid footstep would have attracted his attention. From this and the other facts that I have given you I think it is fair to suspect that Wheaton, whose occupation has taught him to walk softly and, so far as possible, efface himself, followed Strickland to his house and made a demand for additional payment, possibly presuming and becoming insolent, in the belief that Strickland would rather pay than have it known that he had bribed a club waiter to betray his fellow members.

"Ordinarily Strickland would have contented himself with kicking him out; but we know that his nerves were on edge. I don't believe that there was the slightest premeditation about it; but I think that he became enraged, and snatched up the weapon which was convenient to his hand, and used it. It was late, all of the servants had gone to bed, and there were no witnesses of the crime which he had committed in a moment of madness. Strickland is a powerful man and Wheaton was old and slight. It would not have been a difficult burden for him to carry down the flight of stairs, and my theory is that he probably intended to carry the body across the street and throw it over the park wall. He was cunning enough not to withdraw the dagger, which would have permitted a trail of blood to testify against him.

"Arrived at the front door, his courage failed him, and I'll wager that Fifth Avenue looked a mile wide and brilliantly illuminated to him. Possibly he remembered the police officer who had spoken to him at the corner only a few minutes before, and it is also possible that he even heard his step approaching. Terrified, he dropped his burden and closed the door softly, forgetting in his fear the telltale weapon which he had left sticking in the wound. I think it was the sight of that which made him betray such excitement when he again opened the door at Daly's summons. Then he called upon Lucas to help him out—and I happen to know that he trusts that young iceberg implicitly, and relies on him in a good many of his important business schemes.

"Lucas saw that Strickland was in no

condition to stand a rigid questioning by the police, and feared he would break down and betray himself, so he sent him to cover during the day, and hoped he would get a chance to pull himself together before we could get at him. Meanwhile, he profited by the hint which he found in the newspaper reports of this Cervosi case, and, with a certain amount of skill, copied from the reproduction the Black Hand symbols at the foot of this cock-and-bull alleged warning which he had composed. In the event of an accusation being made against Strickland, he would have flashed it, in the hope of throwing us off the scent, to chase rainbows. Doesn't this seem plausible to you, Trenton?"

"Plausible, yes; a little too obviously so," answered Trenton slowly, after a moment of hesitation. "If your suspect were—as you said yourself—a resident of Hell's Kitchen, I should tell you to go ahead and arrest him. The best he could expect would be some one like Howler and Hubble to defend him; but we could never convict a man of Strickland's wealth and position on that evidence. Why not have Lucas brought up here and question him now? You'll have to arraign him to-morrow, and that will make the whole thing public."

Cromwell nodded assent, and, summoning one of his assistants, ordered his prisoner brought up.

"We don't wish to be interrupted; you needn't wait," he said curtly to the doorman, who had ushered Lucas in through a small door at the back of the office. "Take a chair, Lucas; this is Mr. Trenton, the district attorney, and we wish to ask you——"

"I know Mr. Trenton, and I hope that now that there is some one who knows something about the law here, you will bring this farce to an end," interrupted Lucas. "I'm not trying to run away, and I have very important business to attend to for Mr. Strickland to-day."

"I hope that you will soon be free to attend to it, Lucas; but I must warn you that Inspector Cromwell is entirely within his rights in arresting you," answered Trenton, before Cromwell could speak. "You knew that a murder had been committed, and that the police were very anxious to question Mr. Strickland concerning it. So far as I can make out, you deliberately threw them off the track as to his whereabouts, and very possibly aided the murderer to escape."

"I plead guilty to part of that right here," answered Lucas coolly. "I did advise Mr. Strickland to get out of the way, and I did my best to keep the police from finding him. Part of my duty is to save him from useless annoyance, and he could have told them nothing which I couldn't. He is in no condition to be bothered by their stupidity, and this fool arrest shows about what they are capable of. I don't suppose that even their stupidity is dense enough to accuse him of guilty knowledge of this murder."

"You won't gain anything by abusing us, and you'll have troubles enough of your own without worrying about those of your employer, Lucas," said Cromwell. "Perhaps I took a long shot in pinching you; but you'll have to do a lot of explaining about this before you get out again." He held up the alleged Black Hand communication which had been found in his prisoner's pocket.

Lucas glanced at it indifferently. "Well, what about it?" he asked.

"That's what we are waiting for you to tell us," answered Cromwell grimly.

Lucas shook his head. "I suppose that you have read it, and it should speak for itself," he said quietly. "You may know that I am employed in a confidential capacity by Mr. Strickland, and I am not in the habit of discussing his private correspondence with outsiders. I couldn't resist overpowering physical force, and that letter was taken from me. You can start right along with your 'third degree'; it will take a lot of it to make me tell you anything more about it."

"Don't be foolish, Lucas, no one is going to manhandle you; but you are liable to get into serious trouble through your obstinacy," said Trenton warningly. "This letter purports to come from an organization which is waging

war with the police, and it will probably simplify matters if you tell us about this thing. I assume that it bears some relation to the murder?"

Lucas' face remained impassive.

"You are at liberty to assume anything you please," he said. "My arrest furnishes me with sufficient evidence of the foolishness of the police, and I don't intend to say anything which they can twist into a justification for holding me. I'm almost surprised that I am not accused of writing it myself."

"Under the circumstances, that wouldn't seem like such a far-fetched charge, Lucas," said Cromwell. "It's the kind of a communication which a man who had nothing to conceal would carry at once to the police. Take the case of Cervosi as an instance. He received a number of letters signed with exactly similar symbols. He said nothing about them, and gave up close to a hundred thousand dollars before he became convinced that there would be no ending to the demands until he was cleaned out. Then he brought the next one to us, and within forty-eight hours we had the men who had blackmailed him out of a small fortune behind the bars."

"Yes; I understand that you have pinched three poor devils whose combined assets would probably figure up about a ten-dollar bill," answered Lucas sarcastically. "The papers gave a pretty full description of their lives during the past few months. They seem to have lived in one tenement room with a half dozen others, doing their own cooking when they had anything to cook. Just the kind of a life I should expect successful blackmailers to live."

Cromwell's face flushed, and Trenton shifted uneasily in his chair. The success of the police in taking Cervosi's blackmailers red-handed had been widely heralded; but they had had enough experience with the Italian secret societies to know that the men they had taken were simply the ignorant tools of those who had profited by the singer's fears. Lucas had put his finger on the weak spot in their case, and Cromwell winced.

"It's quite possible that there is some one with more intelligence behind them," he said, his voice betraying his irritation. "Some one capable of writing such a letter as this, for instance; for the men we arrested are illiterate. There are some points about this letter which are strikingly similar to those received by Cervosi. The symbols at the bottom are identical; they might have been traced one above the other."

"I stand amazed at your sagacity!" exclaimed Lucas mockingly. "Perhaps they were all made with the same rubber stamp."

"No; but it would be extremely curious if they had all been drawn by the same pen, Mr. Lucas," continued Cromwell sternly. "You have amused yourself by jeering at the stupidity of the police; but there is one thing which they have been clever enough to find out. This letter happens to have been written on Strickland's private letter paper. There is an abundant supply of it in the desk of the library where you and your employer spent the night following the murder of Wheaton."

Just a shade of surprise came to the expression of Lucas' eyes.

"Mr. Strickland has no monopoly of that make of paper," he said. "I dare say that it can be purchased in a dozen shops in New York."

"That's a bad guess, Lucas; only one house that we can find ever imported it, and Strickland bought all they had about two years ago," answered Cromwell triumphantly. "Here are a few sheets which I brought from the house; you can see that it is of a peculiar texture, and has an English watermark."

Lucas examined them carefully, and replaced them on the desk.

"You are right, inspector, it is a peculiar paper," he acknowledged.

"This coincidence seems to be important enough to warrant investigation," suggested Trenton, after they had waited vainly for a moment for further comment.

"Quite so; and I hope that you will go as far as you like with it," assented the secretary. "I shall be interested in hearing what you find out."

"See here, Lucas; this won't go!" exclaimed Cromwell angrily. "There's too close a connection between the inside of Strickland's house and what was found on his doorstep to let it pass without explanation, and if you want to save Strickland and yourself a lot of bother you had better tell us all you know. Do you recognize this?" He held up the bloodstained dagger.

At sight of it Lucas gave an exclamation of displeasure.

"Inspector, I think that you might have the decency to take better care of property which you confiscate!" he said. "Mr. Strickland values that more than any other piece in his collection, and rust stains will not improve it."

Cromwell grinned significantly as he held it so that Lucas could see it better.

"I am not responsible for those stains, young man," he said. "They were made by Wheaton's blood. This is the knife with which he was killed."

"Is this part of your 'third degree,' inspector?" demanded Lucas incredulously.

Trenton broke in before Cromwell could answer.

"He is giving it to you straight, Lucas," he said. "Take my tip and don't hold out on us. I'll be frank with you; enough circumstantial evidence has been discovered to warrant us in taking steps which would make it mighty unpleasant for both you and Strickland. I am always a little suspicious when it comes so easily, and I believe that it can be explained away by a little frankness now on your part. Tell us what you know about this letter."

Lucas hesitated for a moment, and then shook his head.

"You've gone about this in the wrong way, Trenton," he said obstinately. "As far as I can see, you can't make it any more unpleasant for me than you have. I am under arrest, and that's about all you can do to me until a jury has had a whack at your evidence. I suppose that I shall have the privilege of seeing my lawyer?"

"As soon as you are arraigned in court, yes."

"I want to get at him as soon as possible," said Lucas quickly. "He arrived in New York this morning on the *Roagna*. Mrs. Strickland was on that steamer, too, and I want him to get me out in a hurry that I may look after her. Mr. Strickland left that to me."

"Who is your lawyer?" asked Trenton.

"His name is Winthrop Clifford, and I wish that you would send a hurry call for him," replied Lucas; and that young man was more surprised at the effect of his answer than by any of the curious things which had happened in the past few days. The district attorney turned quickly to Cromwell with a most aggravating smile playing about his lips, and the inspector half started from his chair, and gave utterance to something suspiciously like a curse.

"Take it easy, Cromwell!" said Trenton warningly. "Remember that Clifford is a full-fledged member of the bar, even if he hasn't practiced his profession recently. Don't you think we had better make an exception in this case and let your prisoner see him at once?"

Cromwell hesitated for a moment, his eyes fixed on the letter which had been taken from Lucas' pocket.

"All right," he said finally, and with evident reluctance. "I'll send my own men after him."

He touched a button on his desk, and started to give directions for the summoning of Clifford to the man who answered it.

"It won't take much time to get him, inspector," interrupted the officer, before he had finished. "Mr. Clifford has been waiting most impatiently to see you for the last fifteen minutes, and I should have announced him if you had not given orders that you were not to be disturbed."

A moment later Clifford was in the office, and, after greeting the district attorney and Cromwell, looked inquiringly at Lucas.

"What are you doing here, Dick?" he asked, in surprise; and Lucas nodded toward Cromwell.

"I'm the guest of the inspector, there, as the result of an invitation I couldn't

refuse," he answered. "I'm not quite sure what crime I have committed——"

"Lucas is under arrest, and has asked to see you," interrupted Cromwell curtly. "There is no charge against him; I had him brought here to see if we could not make him a little more communicative than he was while he was occupying the residence of his employer, Mr. Joseph Strickland, and I hope that you can make him——"

"Strickland! Lucas, are you in Mr. Strickland's employ?" broke in Clifford eagerly.

"I have been ever since I left college; I am his private secretary now," answered Lucas.

"And your arrest has something to do with the murder of that man whose body was found on his doorstep, I suppose? I saw the account of it in the papers which the pilot brought on board, and Mrs. Strickland was very much excited about it."

"You can search me without finding an explanation of the blunders which the police are capable of committing," replied Lucas. "They seem to think that Mr. Strickland is a murderer, and that I am a Black Hander. One supposition is just about as probable as the other; but I believe it is a prisoner's privilege to have a private intervew with his lawyer, and I'd rather talk this over with you alone."

"Hold on a minute, Lucas! I suppose that you are hot about your arrest, but take it easy," said Clifford quietly. "Cromwell, is there anything which suggests the Black Hand in this business?"

"Only this fake Black Hand letter which we found in Lucas' pocket," answered Cromwell.

Clifford took it from him and read it eagerly.

"Gentlemen, fake or no fake, I have reason to believe that our friends of *la Mano Nera* are engaged in one of the greatest conspiracies in their history," he said gravely. "I have seen evidences of it in Naples, and it is no picayune affair. Mrs. Strickland was not the only noteworthy passenger on the *Roagna;* the saloon list included the names of Count Luigi Menendez, Professor Carlo Spadavi, and the deputy, Ernesto Bianchi."

"Well, what of it?" demanded Cromwell gruffly, apparently displeased that Clifford was threatening to upset his very plausible theory.

"There is just this much of it," answered Clifford. "Menendez is one of the most prominent of the gilded youth of Naples, a descendant of one of the most powerful of the noble Spanish families which flourished there under the Bourbons. Carlo Spadavi is a professor in the university, and Bianchi a deputy in parliament and one of the shrewdest politicians of southern Italy. Each one of them is prominent and well known in his own particular line, and the few men who really know the inner life of the city of Naples know that each one of them is an influential member of the Neapolitan Camorra. When such a lot of buzzards leave the home roost and travel together across the ocean it is safe to assume that there is the prospect of an enticing feast, and from what I have heard and seen since I came in here, I——"

"Just a minute, Clifford!" interrupted Cromwell, as he pressed the button on his desk. The doorman answered the summons, and, at a nod from Cromwell, motioned to Lucas to accompany him. Lucas made vehement protest; but quieted at a sign from Clifford.

"Young man, if you are going to make a monkey of me I prefer to have as few witnesses to the performance as possible," said Cromwell ruefully, as the door to the prison passageway closed behind Lucas and his jailer. "I told Trenton that I would eat that letter if it was genuine; but I hope you are not preparing a dish of crow for me."

"I can tell better about that when I know all that has happened here," answered Clifford, smiling. "I'm beginning to suspect that Strickland's millions are the mark the Camorra is aiming at, for the three gentlemen I have mentioned were Mrs. Strickland's most devoted attendants on the voyage."

"Then, by Jingo, I'll have them pinched before they can turn the trick!" exclaimed Cromwell, rising from his

chair. But Clifford motioned to him to sit down again.

"Cromwell, if you take my tip you'll square yourself for having made a blunder in arresting Lucas, before you make a worse one in arresting three foreigners of their prominence without evidence; and, I suspect from what I know of Lucas' ability to hold his tongue, that he can supply it if he wants to."

"He wouldn't give up to us," grumbled the inspector.

Clifford shrugged his shoulders, and walked to the doorway through which Lucas had passed.

"Give me a half hour with him, and I'll guarantee he will confide in me," he said, and, much against his will, Cromwell gave the directions which permitted Clifford to interview his reticent prisoner.

III.

Strickland had left New York in ignorance of the many suspicious circumstances the police had discovered which seemed to point to his complicity in the killing of Wheaton. As a matter of fact, he had followed Lucas' advice in keeping out of the way during the day because he realized that he was in no mental condition to stand the cross-questioning which the mere fact that Wheaton's body had been found at his door would inevitably imply.

Contrary to Cromwell's theory, he had not recognized the dagger; but even in that dim light he had been able to identify Wheaton's well-known face, and, although it never occurred to him that he might be accused of the murder, he had at once connected it with the two preceding tragedies and did not for a moment doubt that the postman would in the morning deliver to him the third of those letters whose coming he had learned to dread.

Lucas had tried to laugh at his fears when he came; but through the long watches of the night Strickland had paced from end to end of the great library like a man distracted; vainly trying to find a solution for the persecution to which he was being subjected, speculating as to where the next blow would fall, and impatiently waiting for the mail delivery which would justify or banish his fear that this murder was the third manifestation of Black Hand activity.

He was immeasurably relieved when Lucas hurried back to the house after his meeting with the postman, and answered his look of eager inquiry with a negative shake of the head. In the bundle of mail which he had received there were a few circulars, a couple of personal letters, and a bill or two; but nothing which bore on the tragedy that had been enacted on his doorstep. The wear of anticipation had been great enough to exhaust him, however, and he was glad to take Lucas' advice and go to a quiet hotel in Jersey City, where he slept brokenly until the departure of his train for Washington.

The investigating committee obtained little information of value from Strickland. With every appearance of frankness, he gave them masses of figures which he seemed to have at the tip of his tongue. But his testimony shed little real light upon whether the alleged illegal combination of the refrigerator companies which he had brought about had contributed to the increased cost of living, although it was as plain as a pikestaff that somebody must have chipped in to pay the tremendous amount which he had added to his fortune as a result of that consolidation. Perhaps Strickland was able to concentrate his mind upon his answers because of a telegram which he carried in his pocket; a message from Mrs. Strickland stating that she had arrived safely in New York and would join him that evening in Washington.

The committee wished to question him further on Monday, and he planned that they would spend the following day, Sunday, at Old Point. Mrs. Strickland had accepted that plan, and his private car had returned to bring her over from New York.

For eight months Mrs. Strickland had been absent in Italy, studying under the greatest of the Italian singing teachers. Strickland had accompanied her there, superintending her comfortable installa-

tion in one of the finest of the Neapolitan private hotels before he hurried back to the supervision of his complicated business affairs.

The cultivation of her voice had been her principal ambition in life after the novelty of the position which her marriage had given her had worn off, and Strickland had softened his refusal of her request to return to the stage by a good-natured indulgence of what he considered a harmless fad.

He had showered her lavishly with jewels, and her private bank account was never questioned; but the exigencies of the business which supplied her with those luxuries had made him niggardly of his time, and he looked forward with the pleasantest of anticipation to their meeting after the long separation. He hurried along the station platform to the end of the long train to which his car was attached, and jumped on the platform with a cry of welcome; but it was Sam, the colored porter, whom he nearly embraced in the entrance before he discovered his mistake.

"Get out of the way, you black rascal; I am looking for my wife," he said; but Sam continued to bar the passage, and his white teeth gleamed between his thick lips.

"I reckon you-all will have to wait a bit, Mistah Strickland," he said. "The missis ain't on bo'd."

"What's that? What in the devil do you mean by bringing this car over here without her?" demanded Strickland angrily.

"It's the missis' own ohdahs, suh," answered Sam quickly, something which he saw in Strickland's eyes making him increase the distance between himself and the irate man who faced him. "Dat furrin lady dat waits on her brung her baggage to the station and tells me dat de cyah was not to wait foh the missis. She says dat de missis done telegraft you-all, an' dat it would be all right."

"Do you mean Mrs. Strickland's maid, Sam?" inquired Strickland.

The negro grinned, and nodded eagerly.

"Yes, suh; dat was de pusson," he answered. "Not de same lady as tended to her last year when we made dat run to Mexico; but anothah furriner. I seen her a-waitin' on de missis when I went up to youah residence this mawnin' to make de announcement dat de cyah was in readiness foh her disposition."

"That's right; I know that Mrs. Strickland has changed maids," said Strickland, so puzzled by the unexpected change in plans that he racked his brain for a possible explanation. "Here, boy! Is that telegram for me?"

"If youse is Mr. Joseph Strickland it is," answered the messenger who carried the yellow envelope.

Taking it from him without answering, Strickland hurriedly read the contents.

"It's all right, Sam," he said, in a tone of mingled relief and disappointment. "Have the car switched on to the Old Point express according to schedule. Mrs. Strickland will meet me there."

The message was cordial and affectionate, and Strickland was sufficiently familiar with his wife's vagaries to read nothing unusual in it, although he was none the less disappointed that she had changed her plans at the last moment and elected to go to Old Point on Reggie Culver's yacht instead of joining him to make the journey from Washington. In any case, she would join him the following morning, and he made the best of it; but he barely tasted the elaborate dinner which the negro chef had prepared to tempt the more exacting palate of Mrs. Strickland.

The waiting hours on Sunday morning were weary and irritating ones for Strickland. Every ten minutes he made inquiry of the operator for a report of the sighting of the yacht *Aloha*, which he calculated should have arrived not later than nine, and at noon had not been heard of. Strickland was more irritated than anxious, believing that Culver and his guests were coming down slowly and loitering at the intermediate resorts; but at three in the afternoon the operator, who had transmitted a dozen urgent wireless messages for him during the morning, came to him with a yellow slip in his hand.

"I have discovered why we could not locate the *Aloha* along the coast, Mr. Strickland," he said. "I have just received this from our marine office in New York:

"Yacht *Aloha* has been for past week undergoing repairs at Erie Basin. Owner, Culver, absent from city. Inquire of Mr. Strickland if we shall endeavor to locate and forward message. Those addressed to Mrs. Strickland have been delivered at city residence."

Strickland looked at him in amazement, and drew from his pocket the telegram which he had received just before leaving Washington.

"Confound it; the telegraph people have made a bad blunder here some place!" he exclaimed angrily. "Either the Western Union has made a mistake in transmission, or the wireless people's information is inaccurate!"

The operator read the message carefully and hesitated before answering. Strickland was a director in both companies, and it would not be wise for an operator to earn his displeasure.

"This message seems to be clear enough, Mr. Strickland," he said. "If you like I can wire to have it repeated. The marine office does not often make mistakes, and I can vouch for the accuracy of this information. I have been in communication with every ship which carries our apparatus between here and Sandy Hook, and none of them has sighted the *Aloha*. Isn't it possible that Mrs. Strickland again changed her mind, and decided—excuse me; that's my call." Strickland was familiar with the Morse code, and his astonishment grew as he listened to the clicking of the sounder. It was a message to himself, and after the formal address he translated the dots and dashes into:

Circumstances which I could not control prevented my departure from New York to join you at Old Point. Beg of you to be patient and return to New York, where everything will be explained to you to-morrow morning. Will save expression of my great disappointment until we meet again. Remember, you are expected to be at home to-morrow morning, not later than nine.

Lovingly,

GILDA.

"I read that on the sounder," said Strickland curtly, when the operator handed him the transcription of the message. "You are a good guesser, young man, and I reckon you know more about women than I do. Now, if you'll take a message to the railway people, and tell 'em to run my car into the station hitched to the best engine they can raise, I'll get back to New York as fast as they can give me a clear track."

Many strange experiences fall to the lot of Inspector Cromwell's subordinates; but the two detectives to whom the shadowing of Strickland had been intrusted will long remember that trip —"special"—to New York.

The train consisted of an engine, a single baggage car, and Strickland's private palace on wheels, and pretty much everything was sidetracked to give it right of way. Choked with dust and cinders, pelted with rain, and bruised by the jolting and swaying of the cars caused by the great speed, they stuck to their posts, lying flat on the car tops, cramped on the trucks, or clinging desperately to the exposed platforms.

Never did two more disreputable-looking hobos board the ferry at Jersey City; but, in spite of the luxury with which he had been surrounded, Strickland's face was little less haggard than theirs. The blue devils of apprehension had been his companions throughout the night, and while he could figure no possible connection between this last disappointment and the mysterious blows which he had received from his unknown persecutors, he was obsessed with a terrible fear that the cause of her failure to join him was due to injury inflicted by their hands.

"Mrs. Strickland is well, I trust, Watkins?" he said anxiously to the butler who opened the door for him at eight the following morning.

"I hope so, sir; but I have heard nothing from her, sir," answered Watkins, evincing as much surprise as a well-trained domestic machine is capable of showing. "I supposed that she would be returning with you, sir."

"Returning with me? Returning from where?" demanded Strickland. "Do you mean to tell me that she is not here?"

"No—I mean yes, sir," answered Watkins, confused by the rapid fire of questions. "Mrs. Strickland has not been here since Saturday, sir. We understood that she was intending to join you in Washington, sir. I hope that she——"

"With whom did Mrs. Strickland leave the house?" interrupted Strickland.

"She drove to the station in the landau, sir. Studley was on the box with the coachman, and her maid and the new manservant whom she brought with her were inside."

A hurried summons brought Studley, the footman, from the stables; but the information which he could give was not enlightening. He had assisted in carrying the bags onto the ferryboat, and then Mrs. Strickland had sent him back, saying that her maid and the Italian valet could manage on the other side. They had been in ample time to catch the noon train. Strickland was dumfounded and absolutely at a loss for an explanation; but Watkins attracted his attention with a discreet cough.

"There is a person waiting to see you, sir; she would not give her name; but said that she had come by appointment," he said. "I asked her to wait in the library, sir."

Three steps at a time, Strickland raced to the floor above, rushing unceremoniously into the library; but the woman who was waiting for him seemed not in the least startled by his sudden entrance, and continued seated in the large chair near the window. She was clothed from head to foot in somber black, and an impenetrable black veil completely concealed her face.

"You wish to see me? You have business with me?" he demanded eagerly, half wondering if he were not the victim of a heartless practical joke and if the heavy veil did not in fact conceal his wife's face.

The veiled figure assented with the slightest nod of the head, and in a black-gloved hand held out a letter.

All doubt disappeared from Strickland's mind as he took it; for the superscription of the envelope was identical with the two mysterious letters of warning which he had received. With trembling fingers he tore open the envelope, and an imprecation came from his lips as his eyes caught the familiar "READ AND TREMBLE!" in vivid red at the top. Beneath was the following:

Three times you have received communications from us, and your memory will tell you how accurate were the predictions which they contained. Unless you follow in the minutest detail the instructions contained in this, and which will be supplemented by verbal instructions from the bearer, we will venture upon another. You will never again see your wife alive, and the manner of her death will be horrible. The telegrams which purported to come from her were forgeries, and designed to give us time to perfect our arrangements; for since Saturday noon she has been absolutely in our power. You will recognize the ring which is inclosed. We were tempted to send with it the finger from which it was removed, but, for the first and last time, we listened to the pleading of a victim, accepting her assurance that you would, without question, accede to our demands. Should she be mistaken, we shall exact payment, with interest, and send you the entire hand. She will be restored to you piecemeal; but your compliance with following directions will obviate the painful necessity and permit us to restore her to you unharmed, without violating the immutable laws of our brotherhood.

First: You will refrain absolutely from communicating with the police officials until this matter is concluded. Second: In the hearing of the bearer you will order your own carriage, and, in her company, proceed in it to your bank—or more than one, if necessary—to withdraw the money for Mrs. Strickland's ransom. The bearer will be at your elbow during all of the transactions, and it is perhaps superfluous to warn you that at the first sign of treachery on your part she will disappear, and your opportunity to rescue Mrs. Strickland will be forever lost. As to the amount of that ransom, we are satisfied to take the amount which you are stated to have received as a result of holding up the Prendergast consolidation. The full account of that little operation was published yesterday, and your profits are stated at a million and a half of dollars. This you will obtain in the bills of largest possible denomination, to save bulk, and deliver to the bearer of this letter. When that part is completed you will follow such directions as she will give you. You will find

it quite useless to question her, and equally useless to attempt to detain her. She is simply an ignorant tool, carrying out our orders mechanically and under fear. She could give no information which would harm us. She, too, has known the discipline of our brotherhood, and if you would be convinced of its thoroughness, ask her to raise her veil.

Signed to the bottom of the letter were the same symbols which the other two had carried, and with sickening apprehension Strickland drew from the envelope a plain gold ring, which it contained. A glance at it was enough to justify his fears, for engraved on the inside were the initials of his wife's maiden name and the date of their marriage in fanciful script, which he had himself designed. Rage mingled with the despair in his heart, and he turned fiercely on the bearer of this brutal missive; but in spite of his menacing gesture she remained as motionless as a lay figure until his hand dropped to his side, and in a shaking voice he asked her to raise her veil.

Without speaking, she rose from her chair, a slender, graceful figure in her somber robe, and with a black-gloved hand slowly raised the heavy veil which fell well below her chin. Strickland's fears had prepared him for a surprise; but he shrank back with an exclamation of horror from the reality; for never had he seen so terrible an evidence of mutilation. The entire face was crossed and crisscrossed with scars!

Vast as was the sum demanded for Mrs. Strickland's ransom, the sight of that terrible evidence of Black Hand deviltry would have banished Strickland's last hesitation about paying it over. He turned away his own face as the girl lowered her veil.

He rapidly reviewed in his mind the history which had been crowded into his life during the past few days. The receipt of the first letter of warning, his surprise at the cowardice which had led Cervosi to give up so liberally to his blackmailers, the misgivings which that newspaper story had raised in his own mind. He realized that Cervosi knew his own people, and Strickland no longer marveled that Cervosi had hesitated long before resisting; for thorough American as Strickland was, it never entered his mind to refuse the blackmail so cunningly planned for.

The incendiaries' work at his Kentucky farm, and the sinking of the *Gilda* no longer seemed wanton and purposeless to him; for he realized that the properties and lives had been sacrificed to convince him that his persecutors were absolutely ruthless. Had they demanded money in advance to spare those properties he would have defied them; employing an army of men, if necessary, to protect them, but paying not a cent of blackmail.

The personal equation did not enter so largely into those two cases, and as he thought of them he suddenly remembered that this last communication had spoken of three warning letters which had previously been sent to him. After a hasty inspection of the letter, to assure himself that he was not mistaken, he turned again to his visitor.

"I do not know how deeply you are in the confidence of your fellow conspirators; but I find one paragraph in this letter puzzling, and I hope you can explain it," he said, a strange gentleness coming to his voice as he remembered what she, too, had suffered at the hands of his enemies. "I was warned of the burning of my farm buildings and the destruction of my yacht; but of no third tragedy. Can you enlighten me?"

The veiled head nodded a mute assent, and a black-gloved hand pointed to a pile of morning papers which had been deposited on the library table. Strickland snatched the topmost one and spread it out, and in headlines which would have been legible across the room, saw:

MILLIONAIRE'S SECRETARY ACCUSED OF MURDER!

RICHARD LUCAS, CONFIDENTIAL SECRETARY OF JOSEPH STRICKLAND, ARRESTED FOR COMPLICITY IN THE DEATH OF WHEATON.

Clever Scheme to Attribute Crime to Black Hand Detected by Inspector Cromwell. Incriminating Letter Found in Prisoner's Possession Alleged to Be Work of Italian Blackmailers.

An exact reproduction of the letter which Cromwell had taken from Lucas

followed, and, reading it, Strickland realized that his secretary had either shielded him through kindness by concealing the letter which he must have received from the postman that morning, or prepared a blind to save him from police annoyance until his testimony before the senatorial committee was completed. It never occurred to him that Lucas might be in league with his enemies, even when the body of the newspaper story insinuated that the police believed that the young man himself had fabricated the letter, and that the murder was in reality a sequel of the sensational Wall Street operation in which Strickland and Colonel Prendergast had figured.

His perusal of the article was interrupted by a light touch on his arm, and, without speaking, the veiled woman pointed significantly to the clock on the mantel. It was just a minute after ten. The black forefinger then indicated the letter which she had delivered, and pressed the electric call button on the table.

Strickland needed no further explaation, and when Watkins answered the summons he curtly ordered him to have his brougham brought at once to the front door. His visitor listened attentively to the order, and gave a little nod of approbation as the door closed after Watkins' retreating figure.

"You need not worry!" exclaimed Strickland bitterly. "You people have the whip hand, and I know when to give up. Fifteen hundred thousand dollars in ready cash isn't an easy thing for even a very rich man to come by in a hurry without exciting comment and inquiry; but I'll do my best. We shall have to visit a half dozen banks; but I shall play fairly, in the hope that those who have my wife in their power will do the same. Come along, madam; there is no reason for delay."

And so that strangely assorted pair fared forth; the veiled woman maintaining the same ominous silence which she had never broken since their meeting; Strickland looking so old and broken that he was scarcely recognizable as the same man who ten days earlier had whipsawed the Prendergast syndicate out of the money which he was on his way to pay over for his wife's ransom.

Had his companion been less absorbed in watching him to prevent possible treachery she might have noticed that they were both under the close observation of others; for Cromwell's shadowers had been relieved by a half dozen fresh men, and one of them invariably followed the pair into each of the four banks which they visited before the amount of the ransom was collected. Never a word did the woman speak; but not one word which passed between Strickland and the bank tellers from whom he received the money on his personal checks did she miss.

A million and a half in currency, even in bills of large denomination, makes a sufficiently bulky package; but the woman was apparently prepared to care for it. From the large black reticule which she carried she drew a piece of wrapping paper, and, with Strickland's assistance, wrapped the money in it compactly and fastened the precious parcel with stout rubber bands.

Then from the same reticule came a card, with written directions for him to order the coachman to proceed slowly along the curb of Thirty-fourth Street, from Fifth to Sixth Avenue, Strickland in the meantime to turn his back on his companion and to look steadfastly out of the left-hand window of the carriage.

He obeyed implicitly, and before that slow passage was half completed the money which Prendergast and his friends had parted with so reluctantly was deposited in a slim hand which was thrust through the right-hand open window of the carriage, without its owner's face being visible to either of the occupants.

At the busy corner of Sixth Avenue the coachman pulled up; but the veiled woman handed Strickland another card, with the name of a well-known department store written on it, and the injunction for him to wait for her in the carriage when they arrived there.

Without a murmur, Strickland gave

the requisite order to the coachman, and watched the slender, graceful figure of his silent companion alight and mingle with the crowd of women attracted by a widely advertised bargain sale.

For at least ten minutes, which seemed as many hours, Strickland waited with all of the patience he could muster for his companion's return. Convinced of the absolute futility of resistance, he had made unconditional surrender, and he would have met even greater demands than the blackmailers had made upon him without expressed objection. After all, large as had been the ransom which he had delivered with no other guarantee than the implied promise of his persecutors, it was but a tithe of his fortune, and the money sacrifice troubled him not one bit. The forced inaction of waiting was far more annoying, and he was just beginning to be suspicious that his companion had deserted him for good and all when the door handle turned.

With an exclamation of relief he leaned forward; but when the door swung open it was not the veiled woman, but a thickly set, shrewd-faced man, who confronted him.

"Mr. Strickland, I am Inspector Cromwell, of the police, and I must ask you to accompany me to headquarters," he said bluntly. "Shall we have your carriage take us there?"

"I have no time to go with you now, inspector," answered Strickland irritably. "I'll come down there later; but I'm waiting here for a lady, and I can't say just when I shall be at liberty."

"No more can I, Mr. Strickland, and you force me to tell you that you are not at liberty now," said Cromwell, stepping uninvited into the brougham. "It is useless for you to wait here for the woman who came here with you. By this time she is under arrest and on her way to my office. You had better come along quietly; I have no desire to make a scene; but come you must."

Cromwell had expected a protest; but he was totally unprepared for what came. For a moment Strickland's pale face became even whiter, and he recoiled as if he had been dealt a blow.

That phase was only momentary, however; for in a flash he saw what the interference of the police would mean, and with the ferocity of a tiger fighting for its young he clutched the inspector's throat with one hand and with the other dealt him a terrific blow between the eyes.

Single-handed the police officer would have been overpowered; for he was surprised by the suddenness of the attack, half stunned by the blow, and in the narrow confines of the brougham he could not draw the blackjack which had quieted many a refractory prisoner. But while the inspector had elected to make the actual arrest single-handed, he had an abundance of assistance at hand; and even before the uniformed officers, attracted by the gathering crowd, arrived, Strickland had been dragged from the carriage by a couple of burly headquarters men, and, after considerable rough handling, securely handcuffed.

He was half stunned from the blows received in the struggle, and before he had entirely recovered consciousness, he was on the way to Centre Street; a detective sergeant on the box beside the driver, another seated with him in the brougham, and, facing him on the little seat, Inspector Cromwell, both eyes swollen and rapidly discoloring.

There was no conversation; for Strickland was suffering more from the reaction following his outburst of rage than from the physical violence to which that futile resistance had subjected him. A little stream of blood trickled over his face from a scalp wound inflicted by a detective's billy, and added to the ghastliness of his already haggard face; but Cromwell regarded him pitilessly, for in the hopeless despair of his eyes he read an unconscious acknowledgment of the crime with which he was about to charge him.

The silence was unbroken until he gruffly ordered his prisoner to get out when the carriage drew up in front of the entrance to police headquarters, and without explanation Strickland was hurried through the corridors to the inspector's private office.

There he was left, under the guardianship of the detective sergeant who escorted him, while Cromwell, after sending urgent messages to Trenton and Clifford, busied himself with making such applications to his blackening eyes as long experience had taught him would be soothing.

Despite the discoloration, there was a look of triumph in them as he entered the office with the two men who had promptly answered his summons. He smiled grimly at Trenton's exclamation of astonishment when he caught sight of Strickland huddled down in an attitude of great dejection in his chair, his wrists still encircled by the steel bands.

"Great Scott, Cromwell! what is the meaning of this?" cried Trenton. "Are you still married to your folly, after what Lucas has told us and the information you received from Clifford?"

"I'm not so married to Clifford that I accept all of his theories without question," answered Cromwell defiantly. "The Black Hand is a willing animal; but it can't be made to carry all of the mysterious crimes which are committed in this city. I've got this gentleman as nearly with the goods on as I've ever landed a crook in my life, in spite of all Clifford's pet theories and forecasts. I nailed him just in time to prevent his making his getaway, and if you'll look at my face you'll see that he put up a fight for it."

"Mr. Trenton, I protest to you against this outrage!" exclaimed Strickland, taking courage from the plainly expressed incredulity on the district attorney's face. "It is of the utmost importance to me—a matter of life and death—that my liberty should be at once restored. I can't conceive of what charge has been made against me; but I can furnish unlimited bail, and——"

"Prisoners charged with murder are not admitted to bail," interrupted Cromwell. "That is the charge against you, Strickland; so you may as well save your protest."

Strickland made a despairing gesture with his manacled hands.

"That is madness, gentlemen!" he exclaimed. "It is you who are this moment contributing to the murder of an innocent woman whose life will be sacrificed by my detention. I am rich; but I am willing to sacrifice my entire fortune for freedom now; it is imperative that I——"

"Hold on a minute, Mr. Strickland," interrupted Trenton soothingly. "Cromwell is acting on honest conviction; but I believe that he has made a grave mistake. Calm down a little and tell us the facts. I am sure that Mr. Clifford agrees with me, and we may be able to aid you in convincing the inspector."

Strickland hesitated for a moment, and then shook his head.

"I can't tell you the details, gentlemen," he said hopelessly. "That would insure the very thing which I am trying to prevent. I can only tell you that my wife has been abducted, that she is in the hands of miscreants who would hesitate at nothing, as I have bitter reason to know. I was on the point of gaining her release when I was arrested by this man and his subordinates. That is all that I can tell you, for further confidence on my part would inevitably lead to a horrible death for her."

Cromwell listened stolidly; but Trenton was impressed with Strickland's sincerity and turned to Clifford.

"What's your opinion of this, in the light of what you already know?" he asked.

Clifford shrugged his shoulders. "Cromwell has given me such a decided series of hints to mind my own business during the past two days that I almost hesitate to express an opinion."

The inspector laughed. "Go ahead! Express as many as you like; they can't alter facts."

"Then I am sorry to say that I believe you have committed the worst blunder of your career," said Clifford quietly. "From what I have recently observed in Italy, from what Lucas has told me, and from what Mr. Strickland has just stated, I believe that Mrs. Strickland may be in very grave peril, and I hope that before it is too late you will release him and enable him

to complete his negotiations for her release."

"That's all tommy rot!" exclaimed the inspector, with an imperative gesture to Strickland to keep quiet. "I'll be tempted to take some stock in it when you can convince me that a level-headed business man will give up a million and a half for ransom to a gang of blackmailers. You've stated your theories; now I'll give you facts. You know of the chain of evidence which connected Strickland with the Wheaton murder. Well, I put just enough stock in your theories to be a little doubtful, and I was satisfied to keep him under observation. If your theories were correct, an attempt would soon be made to blackmail him, and I could at least get the blackmailers.

"Up to this morning I was still doubtful, and when I had him shadowed, and found that he drove to a bank in the company of a closely veiled woman and withdrew a large amount in currency, I began to take more stock in your theory. He continued on his round, however, visiting four different banks and receiving a very large sum at each. The total grew to greater proportions than any man would give up for blackmail, and I became convinced that I was right, after all; he was preparing to beat it and gathering in his fall money.

"That conviction became stronger when we arrested the man to whom that tremendous sum was passed on and identified him as one of Strickland's confidential servants; it became absolutely convincing to me when my men gathered in his female companion and we identified her as Mrs. Strickland's personal maid.

"It's all very well to listen to this cock-and-bull story about abduction; but the kidnaping of an able-bodied woman is no easy matter in the places which a woman of Mrs. Strickland's prominence would frequent. If you want theories, I can give you a dozen; but it's the one best bet that Mrs. Strickland is anxiously waiting in some quiet place for the appearance of her husband with the million and a half which would enable them to live fairly comfortably in Morocco, or one of the resorts where extradition treaties are not working.

"I'm not taking any chances on this delegate getting beyond reach of the law until he and Lucas manage to explain away a little of this cloud of suspicious circumstances which surround them. This is Strickland's chance—I'll give him that before taking him before the magistrate and making the charge. But it's dollars to doughnuts that he will be committed to the Tombs within an hour if he doesn't give up now."

Clifford and Trenton looked at each other hopelessly, both realizing that Cromwell's obstinacy would make it difficult to obtain Strickland's release, and each convinced that the inspector, while entirely sincere in his belief, was inflicting a great wrong by the exercise of his arbitrary power.

"Mr. Strickland, your secretary, Dick Lucas, has retained me as his counsel, and has told me in confidence all of the details of the persecution to which you have been subjected," said Clifford, making no comment on the inspector's statements. "I assume that the facts which the inspector has given to us are substantially correct; but I am quite prepared to accept your interpretation of them. I shall not waste time in trying to convince him of his error; but I shall do my best to avert the consequences which you fear."

"You keep out of this for a minute, Clifford!" interjected Cromwell, before Strickland could answer. "I've got a couple of prisoners here that I believe will give up more easily than Strickland or Lucas; we won't have to handle them quite so tenderly. Davis, bring up that Italian and the bundle he was carrying."

The man who had been guarding Strickland left the room, and a moment later returned with a good-looking, well-dressed young Italian; the property clerk accompanying them, carrying the bundle of currency which Strickland had assisted in wrapping up in the carriage.

Strickland could not restrain an exclamation as they entered.

Cromwell looked triumphantly at Trenton. "I knew he would recognize him," he said. "A man doesn't turn over a sum such as that package contains to a stranger."

"I never saw this man before in my life!" protested Strickland. "It is not that; it is that money. If it does not reach the people for whom it was intended, I tell you my wife will be killed."

"We'll have to take a chance on that, then," answered Cromwell incredulously. "What's the use, Strickland? This man has already confessed that he is in your employ."

Clifford said a few words in Italian to the prisoner, who answered him eagerly.

"I'll save time by butting in, Cromwell," he said apologetically. "This man crossed on the steamer with me. He was Mrs. Strickland's courier, and he says that he has never seen Mr. Strickland before."

"Let it go at that for a minute, then," answered Cromwell, attaching no importance to the answer. "Perhaps he'll deny the acquaintance of the other one, too; but I happen to know that he spent some time in her company this morning. Davis, bring in that woman."

Strickland cowered down in his chair as the door from the outer office opened and a black-gowned woman was half shoved, half carried in. She was without hat or veil; but she was sobbing hysterically, and her face completely hidden by a handkerchief which she held before her eyes. He raised his own manacled hands as if to shut out the vision which had remained with him as a horrible nightmare; but he dropped them again, and a cry of relief came from his lips as the inspector unceremoniously snatched the handkerchief away.

The face which stood revealed was swollen and discolored with weeping; but it was that of a very pretty girl and unmarred by scar.

"Gentlemen, I swear by all that I hold most sacred that the inspector's statement is false!" exclaimed Strickland. "This is not the woman who accompanied me this morning. I never saw her before; there is no possibility of a mistake."

"Perhaps the all-wise Mr. Clifford can help us out on this, too," suggested Cromwell sarcastically.

Disregarding the tone, Clifford nodded, and, turning to the girl, spoke to her gently in Italian. Reassured by the sound of her own language, she ceased her weeping, and answered his questions readily, the others waiting impatiently for his translation.

"The girl bears out Mr. Strickland's statement," he said, when his questioning was finished. "She says that she was making some purchases at Lacy's this morning when she was arrested. That she came to the store on foot, and that she never saw Mr. Strickland before."

"Nor Mrs. Strickland, either, I suppose!" exclaimed Cromwell jeeringly.

"No, she says nothing of the kind," retorted Clifford. "She was engaged as a maid by Mrs. Strickland in Naples, three months ago. She accompanied her to this country; but last Saturday she was given her return passage money, two months' wages, and her dismissal. This man, Peppino, claims that he was treated in exactly the same way. Did you place this woman under arrest yourself, Cromwell?"

"No, I was after bigger game," answered Cromwell, nodding significantly at Strickland. "Davis pinched her."

Clifford turned sharply on the detective sergeant.

"Did you arrest this woman immediately after she entered the store?" he demanded.

Davis shifted uneasily. "No, sir. My orders were to watch her and arrest her if she did not return to the carriage. She was attempting to leave the place by the other door when I took her."

"You never lost track of her in the store?"

"Not for more than five minutes, when she went to the ladies' dressing room; but I watched the only door until I saw her come out." Clifford shrugged his shoulders.

"In other words, you saw one woman dressed in black enter that door and another woman in black come out of it. Cromwell, what's the charge against this girl?"

"I'll attend to that in due time," answered Cromwell, the glance which he threw at Davis suggesting that he would also be attended to. "The House of Detention is the best she can expect."

Clifford said a few quiet words to her and rose from his chair.

"Mr. Strickland, Lucas paid me the compliment to intrust some work for you, as well as his own defense, to me," he continued. "I am sorry that you are suffering from the consequences of a police blunder, complicated by the petty jealousy of a man who has owed much to my peculiar knowledge of Italian conditions in the past. I shall not trouble him in that way in the future; but I can assure you that I shall use that knowledge to find Mrs. Strickland, whom I firmly believe to be the victim of a gang of conspirators."

Cromwell listened with an assumption of indifference; but in spite of the convincing evidence which he believed he held against Strickland and Lucas, a trace of uneasiness was visible on his face as Clifford turned and left the room without listening to Strickland's protestations of gratitude.

Deaf to Trenton's protests, Cromwell arraigned his prisoners immediately in the police court, and before night Strickland was held for the grand jury on the charge of murdering Wheaton; Torelli, the courier, was remanded to enable the police to investigate his case further; but Mimi, the maid, was discharged from police custody.

IV.

No man of ordinary intelligence could have lived as Winthrop Clifford had lived for more than two years without learning much of human nature. In the game he was playing he could not afford to make mistakes; for, practically single-handed, he had pitted himself against the most powerful association of organized criminals in the world, the mysterious Black Hand, the American offshoot of the ancient Neapolitan Camorra and Sicilian Mafia. Clifford's entire boyhood had been spent in Italy, and, while American traditions had been instilled in him in his home, he had absorbed an intimate knowledge of the people and their language from association with them in his play and early education. Wandering from one end of the peninsula to the other with his parents, who had no other aim than to seek amusement and climate, he had learned the principal dialects which distinguish the speech of the different sections of the country more thoroughly than most Italians.

But it was not alone the speech of the people among whom he dwelt that he had acquired. With the receptivity peculiar to childhood, he had absorbed their traditions, instinctively appreciated their mode of thought, and so far adopted their standards of behavior, right and wrong, that his first year in the American preparatory school was nearly completed before he found himself able to adapt himself to the new conditions. His American university and law-school training naturally gave him a new viewpoint and different standards of life; but the lessons learned in childhood and early youth sink deep, and, while he ceased to practice much that he had learned, he did not forget.

It was the merest chance which first involved him in his struggle against the mysterious power of the Italian secret organizations; a chance which entailed tragedies which touched him closely and roused the Anglo-Saxon fighting instinct in him. In Sicily he had accepted, as a matter of course, the dominition of the all-powerful Mafia, and in Naples the secret rule of the Camorra had seemed as natural as the Neapolitan's love of macaroni; but viewing the operations of their offspring through Americanized eyes, he recognized the danger to his native land which this vicious foreign growth threatened.

It was no small sacrifice which Clifford made when he voluntarily relin-

quished the prospect of a brilliant legal career and devoted his time and peculiar knowledge of the Italian people to the struggle against the increasing power of the criminal organization which had gained so firm a foothold in the land of its adoption. The stories of some of his adventures in that long struggle have already been told, and need not be rehearsed; but in them Clifford read the reason for Inspector Cromwell's present obstinacy and antagonism.

Clifford had very early decided that for his own safety, as well as for the success of his fight, he must work without the assistance of the police. It was no part of his ambition to run down the petty malefactors whose hands committed the deeds of violence which inspired a terror of the organization in the hearts of the thrifty and industrious Italians on whom it preyed. During his investigations he had learned enough to send scores of them to long terms of imprisonment or the electric chair; but he knew that their places would be readily filled, and their punishment would not decrease the power of the society.

It was his aim to penetrate to the very innermost circle of that mysterious brotherhood; to gather, before striking, the evidence which would enable the authorities to crush at one blow the whole central machinery. At the outset he had firmly determined to harden his heart against the appeals to his pity which he knew individual cases of oppression would make, and, disregarding them, push on steadfastly to his goal. That was a resolution which it was easier to make than to keep, however, and more than once he had sacrificed the labor of months by calling in the police to avert some peculiarly atrocious piece of deviltry which the mysterious inner council had planned and found willing tools to execute.

Cromwell had profited by and acted upon his information; but hidebound in the traditions of the department, he resented Clifford's secrecy of method and lack of confidence in him. He no longer denied the existence of the secret organization; but, although he was an honest official, he was a narrow man, and he longed for such a victory over the amateur as Clifford had more than once scored against him.

In the Wheaton murder case he firmly believed that he had found his opportunity; for he was convinced that Strickland was guilty, and that the alleged connection of the Black Hand with the murder was a ruse conceived by Lucas to divert suspicion from his employer.

Unfortunately Clifford was unable to tell him of the information he had received from Lucas concerning the first two letters; for it was confided to him as a privileged communication, and upon the condition that he would not communicate it to the police. Lucas held strongly the average New Yorker's distrust of the honesty of the police official, and Cromwell's treatment of him had not increased his respect for their intelligence.

As for Strickland, so firmly was he impressed with the remorseless cruelty of the men who had his wife in their power that torture could not have wrung information concerning them from him. His one hope was that they might read the honesty of his intentions and give him another opportunity to ransom her. His silent companion, who had escaped arrest owing to Detective Sergeant Davis' blunder, would undoubtedly report that no act of treachery on his part had led to the interference of the police, and the papers would most certainly contain full stories of his sensational arrest.

Beyond the mere assertion of his innocence, he had therefore maintained an obstinate silence before the examining magistrate, and had accepted his commitment to the Tombs without protest, trusting that the ingenuity of his persecutors would enable them to find a means of communication with him in prison.

Clifford desired no assistance from the police in his investigation, which he hoped would lead to the safe recovery of Gilda Strickland; but he resented the interference which would make his

task so much the more difficult. Cromwell had readily accepted as fact his assertion that the three prominent Italians who had crossed on the same steamer with Clifford and Mrs. Strickland were influential members of the Camorra; but he had no evidence that they had committed or dictated a crime in the United States, and could take no action against them.

Acting on Clifford's tip, he had ordered them shadowed; but the reports which his men had handed in were negative. Each of them had chosen a different hotel, and, so far as he could discover, had held no communication with each other since landing.

The Count Luigi Menendez, as might have been expected, patronized one of the most fashionable of the great Fifth Avenue caravansaries, indulging his luxurious tastes to the utmost in the matter of food, wines, and apartment. Professor Spadavi had gone to a more secluded hotel, on a side street; and, while he denied himself no physical comfort, he lived quietly, devoting himself to the study of anthropology—the department of science in which he had made a world-wide reputation. Bianchi had taken rooms at a famous old place near Washington Square, a location convenient for his many friends and business correspondents in New York's Italian colony. Menendez, Clifford had previously known in Naples, and his steamship acquaintance with the other two justified his formal calls upon them after landing; but his interest in the disappearance of Mrs. Strickland prevented the close attention which he had intended to pay to them. He had not the slightest doubt that they had planned her abduction, and that it was to their pockets which the major part of the ransom would have found its way; but, realizing the necessity for haste, he decided to work through the humbler members of the conspiracy, trusting that he might gain a weapon which he could use to effect the release of Mrs. Strickland.

In the brief private interview which he had been allowed with Strickland before he was removed from the police court, he had learned of the terrible mutilation which had made the Black Hand messenger unmistakable; but he was convinced that Mimi was also an accomplice. The whole plan had undoubtedly been worked out in advance, and she had been instructed to wait in the ladies' dressing room at Lacy's until the arrival of the other woman; risking, at the most, only a few days of detention if she were arrested.

Watching her during the police court proceedings, he made up his mind that she was absolutely unacquainted with English, and when she left the room he followed her. Her ignorance of that portion of the city was apparently as dense as her ignorance of the language, and, confused and a little frightened by the turmoil of the street, she welcomed eagerly the proffer of assistance with which he accosted her.

"I fear that you have been badly treated by my countrymen, Mimi," he said gently, naturally falling into the singsong Sicilian dialect which she spoke. "For one thing, you must be hungry, and I know of a restaurant not too far away where the Marsala is genuine and the macaroni is cooked in the Neapolitan fashion. Will you lunch there with me?"

She hesitated for a moment, her great, dark eyes looking at him doubtfully.

"The signore is not connected with these odious police?" she said interrogatively.

"If the signorina had understood English she would have appreciated that there is enmity between us," he said, with a reassuring smile; and Mimi smiled in return, remembering the very evident discomfiture of Davis under Clifford's questioning and Inspector Cromwell's ill-concealed chagrin and hostility when those questions had broken down the case against her. Mimi might be a deep-dyed conspirator, but she was nevertheless young, feminine, and human. She was beyond question very hungry, Clifford was a handsome young fellow with an evident appreciation of a pretty face—and his invitation was naturally accepted without fur-

ther question, much to that young man's present satisfaction and his future peril.

"Can you explain to me the reason of all that has happened to me to-day, Mr. Clifford?" she asked, after they were comfortably ensconced in one of the little Italian restaurants where he knew from previous experience the food was good.

Clifford nodded, but waited until the curious waiter had moved beyond earshot before speaking.

"It was a case of mistaken identity, Mimi; but how the police could have made such a terrible blunder I cannot imagine," he said, leaning across the table and looking into her eyes. "Your mirror tells you that you are a very pretty girl, and the woman for whom you were mistaken was anything but that."

"I wore a very heavy veil," she answered naïvely, a little flush of red in the olive skin acknowledging his compliment.

"So did she, my dear, which was the only point of similarity between you," said Clifford. "Possibly you saw her enter the dressing room just before you left it?"

Mimi shook her head. "Not that I remember; but I saw three or four women in there. Can't you describe her more accurately? You have perhaps seen her yourself?"

"No; but from the fact that Davis made the mistake I assume that she must have been very much your height and figure, and, like you, dressed entirely in black. It is not probable that her face had ever been so pretty, but whatever of beauty she may have possessed was lost."

"She was old, then," suggested Mimi.

"No, I believe not; about your age, I should say, from what Mr. Strickland told me," answered Clifford. "Her face was scarred, Mimi; terribly disfigured. You know what I mean; the vengeance of the *soldo!*"

"A victim of the Camorra!" she exclaimed, shrinking back and covering her own pretty face with her hands.

Clifford saw that she was shaking like a leaf, and placed his hand warningly on her arm, for the waiter was returning with a laden tray. Mimi evidently interpreted the meaning of that pressure correctly; for without dropping her hands she simulated an attack of coughing which sufficiently accounted for her heightened color and moist eyes.

"Tell me more—quickly!" she exclaimed eagerly, when they were again left to themselves. "It was very bad, this mutilation—bad enough to transform a face like mine into a thing of horror?"

"Yes, it was very bad, Mimi," replied Clifford gravely. "You know the method; the rim of a *soldo* piece is ground sharp, and the wound which is inflicts leaves a horrible scar from the poisoning of the copper. It had been used most brutally on her; there were a dozen scars, at least. You must have seen examples of such devil's work."

The girl leaned forward, her tightly clasped hands on the table, her great eyes fixed intently on his.

"Yes, I have seen enough of it," she answered, in a voice which he could hardly recognize. "Tell me, of what crime was this wretched woman accused that she should be hounded by your police as well as punished by the vengeance of the Camorra?"

"That would be a long story if I told it all, my dear," answered Clifford, debating in his mind if entire frankness would not be the wisest course in dealing with her. "It could hardly be called a crime; but she was supposed to be aiding Mr. Strickland, who is accused of murder, to get a large sum of money out of the country, so that he and his wife could live in comfort after his flight. When they identified you as Mrs. Strickland's maid, they believed that you were acting as their go-between; that she was in hiding, waiting for him to join her."

An expression of bewilderment came to her eyes as she listened.

"But surely you did not credit that, Mr. Clifford!" she exclaimed. "You who knew Mrs. Strickland so well in Naples would never believe that that shallow-pated, vain, and selfish woman

would for a moment consider giving up her own pleasure and the swarm of flatterers who surround her to become the companion of a fugitive from justice."

Clifford smiled, making a mental alteration of the old saying that no man is a hero to his valet; but not neglecting to note that Mimi had used pure Italian instead of the Sicilian dialect.

"My dear Mimi, I never for a moment believed that she would be put to the test; for her husband had not the slightest intention of flying the country," he answered evasively. "I assume that you did not understand his explanation to the police?"

"Not a word of it; I do not know ten words of English," she answered.

"Then I'll give you the gist of it," said Clifford, in a low voice. "He was cautious, and made no direct charge; but these are the facts. Mrs. Strickland mysteriously disappeared on the very day that we landed from the *Roagna*. Mr. Strickland was sent on a wild-goose chase about the country by forged telegrams purporting to come from her until this morning. Then this woman, for whom you were mistaken by the police, called at his house with a letter which purported to come from the Black Hand, the American branch of the Neapolitan Camorra. It stated that she had been abducted and was absolutely in her captors' power, and demanded a tremendous sum as ransom. This money Strickland obtained in the company of the veiled woman and handed over to her. She undoubtedly passed it on to Torelli, who was immediately arrested with it in his possession. The inspector, who knew nothing of Mrs. Strickland's disappearance and believes that Strickland is guilty of murder, was keeping him under close observation, and, believing that he was getting such a large amount together for the purpose of flight, arrested him after Torelli was taken, and ordered the arrest of the woman who had accompanied him. That is the story, Mimi; you were arrested by mistake."

The girl looked at him curiously for a moment, as if she, too, were debating something in her mind.

"It was a very large sum which he was willing to pay over to get that foolish woman back?" she asked, without commenting on his story.

"Nearly eight millions of *lire*, Mimi," he answered, judging that the sum would sound more impressive translated into Italian money. "He had actually withdrawn that amount in currency; but, unfortunately for the men who were to receive it, it has fallen into the hands of the police, and it will take a long time to get it released." The girl shrugged her shoulders.

"Mr. Strickland is a very rich man, I believe; he must be, to be willing to part with such a fortune for such a woman," she said contemptuously. "He can undoubtedly duplicate the amount without ruining himself. Mr. Clifford, would it be indiscreet if I asked you why you are so interested in this case?"

Clifford laughed and shook his head. "I am a lawyer by profession, Mimi. Mr. Lucas, who is Mr. Strickland's private secretary, is also under arrest, charged with complicity in the Wheaton murder, of which his employer is accused. He is an old college friend of mine, and asked me to defend him. May I in turn venture a very personal question?"

"It would only be fair play," she assented guardedly.

"Then please tell me how a girl of your education and very evident refinement happens to be masquerading as a lady's maid?" he asked abruptly. "You have betrayed yourself, signorina; for no Sicilian servant speaks pure Tuscan."

She returned his sharp scrutiny without the slightest evidence of embarrassment.

"No, I have not betrayed myself, for I had not the slightest intention of keeping up the farce with you, Mr. Clifford," she answered quietly. "I am Sicilian, though, to my backbone; but, as you suspected, not of the serving class. I was educated in the North; in a convent in Perugia. There was a reason for my accepting the menial posi-

tion—the same reason which prompted you to follow me from the courtroom and ask me to lunch with you."

"It could not have been the same reason," he protested, his eyes as eloquent as he could make them of admiration.

With a gesture she dismissed both the implied flattery and the look.

"You seem to forget that you have discovered that I am not a lady's maid," she reminded him sarcastically. "Don't treat me like one when we are alone together, please."

It was Clifford's turn to flush, and he stammered an apology.

"You may still call me 'Mimi,' and leave off the signorina," she continued, in token of her forgiveness. "It may save embarrassment later; for, as we are actuated by the same motive, we are apt to cross paths more than once in the future."

"If you will permit me to say so, I sincerely trust that we may; but I doubt the reason which you have assigned for the possibility," said Clifford. "From the opinion you have expressed of Mrs. Strickland, I do not believe that you are very deeply concerned about what may happen to her, and I tell you very frankly that her rescue from the power of her abductors is what I am after now. I am prepared to pay liberally for that—with her husband's money, of course."

"We are both right—you in assuming that I don't care a snap of my finger what becomes of that vain little fool of a woman, and I in claiming that our motives were the same," she said obstinately. "You followed me from the courtroom and I entered Mrs. Strickland's service with the same object in view."

"And may I ask what you believe my object to be?"

Mimi looked about cautiously, and, although it was late and the other tables were all deserted, she motioned to him to lean forward.

"Yes, I will tell you what you already know; for I believe that we may help each other," she said, in a voice little above a whisper. "We are both seeking the woman with the scarred face!"

Clifford had prepared himself for something unusual; but in spite of the self-control which he had acquired in a hard school, he started back in astonishment, and she looked at him triumphantly. She would have spoken again; but, recovering himself, he held up a hand in warning.

"This is a capital little place to eat in; but there are certain topics which it is better not to discuss, even in whispers, in an Italian restaurant," he said quietly; and, calling the waiter, he paid the modest check, and waited impatiently while his companion, with true feminine deliberation, adjusted her hat and veil and drew on her long, black gloves.

TO BE CONCLUDED.

The second and concluding part of this story will be published two weeks hence, in the first June POPULAR, on sale May 10th.

BEVERIDGE—OPTIMIST

SENATOR ALBERT J. BEVERIDGE, of Indiana, who was defeated for re-election last fall, was asked what he thought about politics as a career.

"There's one pleasing thing about it," he replied. "When you are thrown out, you have the satisfaction of knowing that a majority of your people got what they wanted."

TRAINING FOR DIPLOMACY

Maurice Francis Egan was a newspaper writer and a college professor before he was appointed to his present position of minister to Denmark.

When Everything Goes

A TALE OF THE COMPETENTS

By Roy Norton

Author of "The Toll of the Sea," "The Willow Creek Stories," Etc.

THE man who says that starvation, present or imminent, will not transform any human being, does not know the subject, proves that he is without experience, and unimaginative. Moreover, its most singular transformations are of the law-abiding. The year of the Klondike rush is marked by memories of such transformations, interwoven; memories of figures that pass to and fro across the screen, each in two characters, the one in the disposition of plenty, the other in the man transformed by threatened starvation.

The four Competents, partners all, who had adopted me, a mere youth, into their company, had in the previous year sent outside for supplies, and by mistake these had been forwarded over the passes and long chains of lakes to us at Fort Yukon.

We made a fruitless trip from our mid-Alaskan camp of Tyook to St. Michaels to learn this news, and then returned up the river on an early steamboat to await the precious arrival which was to supply us through another long arctic winter. And thus we came to know those who, for a brief time, played a part in that turgid drama, the drama of food, that threatened to become a tragedy.

Why Fort Yukon should have been called a fort is still beyond my imagination. Boylike I had been accustomed to believe that forts were fortresses, girt round with walls and embankments, cut by embrasures and tenanted by mighty guns and calm-eyed soldiers to man them; but there it squatted, a mere landing place on the shores of the great river that almost at that point widened away into flats, some of which were shallow, some of which twisted and turned with treacherous and writhing currents until at low water navigation for even the lightest draft steamboat was fraught with difficulty and need of knowledge and watchfulness.

Instead of castles and tessellated walls, log cabins stood here and there, facing as the builders had chosen, and restless natives bivouacked at its outskirts.

The steamer that brought us to this waiting place, where we were to receive our supplies, whistled heavily as she forged slowly through the late summer stream, dogs howled a fierce alarm, some exuberant native fired a rifle into the air, the woods opened to expose a clearing, and the steamer crept up to the bank.

Men came running toward us from all directions; men such as we knew from the previous winter, some of them ragged, some of them bearded, and all of them tanned by the long day's sun. The native wood carriers aboard our boat assembled in a motley crowd toward the bow, and stood by to thrust the gangplank out when the boat nosed to the shore. The bells from the pilot house began to clang in the engine room, and the huge paddle wheel astern stopped as if hesitating what to do next. Noiselessly and in stately dignity, we crept closer under our own momentum.

A voice from the shore attracted our attention. Its owner could not wait

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This new series of the "Willow Creekers" in Alaska began in the first March issue. Back numbers can be had at the news stands.

until the boat landed to ask his question.

"You've got grub for us, haven't you? We are about out of flour and bacon, and there isn't a bean left in the camp."

I laughed then. It impressed me as humorous. It was a funny joke; but I had not the right. I was hearing a cry for food, not menacing as yet, but a plea for life.

The captain, bearded and standing in front of the pilot house on the peak of the hurricane deck, did not answer. The man started to repeat his question, but the shouts of the mate giving orders, the sudden lash of a coiled line to the nearest man on the shore, and the screeching whine of the gangplank, crawling forward to launch itself into the sand, drowned his voice. The dogs began running backward and forward through the group of waiting pioneers. One man kicked viciously at a Malemute which almost upset him, and the dog, although untouched, ran howling away. I started across the gangplank with my blankets in a roll across my shoulders, and The Competents, likewise equipped, followed.

"You brought supplies for us, didn't you?" we heard another man insistently calling to the captain, who had not deigned to answer. And another voice took up the refrain: "We're almost out of flour and——"

We crowded through and started toward the log cabins, and the voices were lost behind. The steamer stopped but briefly. We heard expostulations from where we stood outside the combination bar, trading post, and restaurant called "Bevin's Place." A dumb and sullen silence seemed to have settled over those on the river bank.

The soft "chow-chows" of the boat's exhausts were audible, and they began to increase in volume and rapidity as she caught her pace and took on full steam. She had landed nothing more important than us men from Tyook and the mails.

The crowd from the river front began to return. Its members talked loudly among themselves. Some of them cursed fluently, damning the trading companies that owned the steamboats, the country, or anything and everything in general. And underneath all their talk was that constant refrain, that they were threatened with a shortage of food.

We went inside the log cabin, which was one of the largest in the camp, settled ourselves, as became strangers, in the corner, and listened to them. Many were angry. Some were sullen. Others sat thoughtfully around or leaned against the walls and stared abstractedly at shadows, at nothing, as if visualizing the possibilities of a future without food. After a time they began to notice us and were friendly.

"You boys had better take your blankets up and stop in my cabin," said a quiet, grizzled little man with whom we had been talking. "I've not got much grub, but it can be made to do until yours comes. You can't live without grub, you know, and you're welcome. Plenty of room for you all."

And thus began our acquaintance with Lee Howard, who would sit around the front of his cabin in the evening for hours at a time with never a word, but whose flour barrel was open to us as if parting with his remnant of food was all a matter of course. He had as a partner Charles Travers, a broad-shouldered giant of about forty years of age, who, we learned long afterward, had graduated from Yale with honors and was one of the most famous stroke oars that ever made the crew.

Ten days went by with no word from our outfit, and in the meantime men began to come down from Dawson and Circle City in boats, and always they brought the same tale, that there were grave fears of a shortage of food.

Most of these men stopped only long enough to learn that supplies were scant in Yukon, then headed their boats downstream, hoping to find food in the lower camps; but as the days passed gloom settled more deeply upon the village by the river bank and men faced one another gravely. Yukon's last remnant of gayety departed. It was silent

and morose. The specter of starvation leered at it from the dark and bordering forests like a gaunt and starving wolf keeping watch upon its prey.

Another boat came up the river and stopped noisily at the landing. We hurried out with the others, and again saw anxiety reach its heighth. The climax came when we found she was loaded with whisky so new and rank that the barrels shone yellow and the hoops had not had time to gather rust. Whisky upbound for men who had hundreds of thousands of dollars, but could buy no food!

The whole atmosphere of the camp was now black and ominous. Some of the faint-hearted whipsawed lumber, back in the edge of the woods, built boats, and bade farewell to their cabins, and others watched them depart with a bare good-by and a wish for good luck. To the departing ones it seemed better to at least get to St. Michaels and there dwell on its inhospitable barrens through the long winter season, and count a year lost from their lives.

It was like bidding farewell to hope, for there was scarcely a man of them who did not believe that he was in the land of gold and that it could be found were he near supplies to face an arctic winter.

Many of them had their lives' savings invested. Some of them had been in the country for years. All of them felt that to leave was to part with Fortune. They were in the land of promise, and its doors were open, but they could not subsist until they could tear treasure and competency from its soil.

"It isn't as if we couldn't and wouldn't pay for it," Howard exclaimed. "We've got money. We wanted to ship the stuff up ourselves, and not trust to the trading posts, but they said 'No.' They wanted us to pay trading-post rates. We offered to do that. Then they said they had to encourage the local post and that we would have to buy from it. We were willing to do that. They assured us the post would receive a supply big enough for every man in camp. Steamers come and—pass on up to Dawson! Steamers stop and—unload whisky! What do we want of whisky? 'Hutch' is good enough for a fool! The trading companies are running us out of the country, whether they mean to or not."

"But perhaps they can't help it," Travers would object, and Howard would subside into a scornful silence.

"We must have grub, if we have to sink the next boat," truculently observed a lank Missourian, named Carter, who happened to be present at one of the oft-repeated arguments, and after that he invariably started in to tell what he would do, while Travers indulgently smiled and assured him that the camp should not become lawless.

"I'm for law and order," he would declare, "first, last, and always!"

The great event of our own fortunes came one morning when a scow with several upriver natives at the oars and a boat runner, engaged at a fabulous price in Seattle by The Competents' friends, floated down to the shore. The runner delivered it to us, and, elated, we hastened to inspect its cargo.

There were new steam thawers that afterward failed to work, owing to lack of boiler power; boilers to create steam that had coal-burning grates and fire boxes; rubber boots such as California miners wear, but useless in Tyook; some warm underclothing; delicacies we had ordered in the belief that heavier necessities could be purchased from the post; butter in barrels, and cases of canned fruit; but neither flour, bacon, nor beans, the chief essentials of life in that rigorous climate.

We carried quantities of this useless stuff up to the cabin of our hosts, paid off the boat runner and the natives, and made preparations to start down the river on the following morning, for there was no time to waste, as already threats of winter were in the air and the river was daily running lower and widening the beach of pebbles and sand.

"Wake up! Wake up! A steamer's coming in!"

A voice aroused us at six o'clock in the morning of the day we had proposed to start. Already we could hear

sounds of excitement out in the camp. Guns were being fired to arouse laggard sleepers, dogs were howling and barking, and far-off shouts told that men were calling others from rest for the momentous arrival. We surmised that this would probably be the last steamer up the river that year, and knew that the fate of the pioneer village depended upon its cargo.

I joined The Competents and our hosts in a mad race to clothe ourselves, and with them ran outside.

The pale light of an autumn dawn in the arctic circle enshrouded the land. The trees back of us stood motionless and watching, and were the only features at rest. From some of the cabins rolling smoke crawled lazily upward as if loath to start a journey into the upward spaces of air. A fat and shapeless squaw stood in front of a ragged and blackened tent, holding a sheet-iron water pail in one hand and fumbling at the folds of her denim parka with the other. The fat post trader had dragged from his empty shelves a flag, and was wheezily hoisting it and cursing the tangled halyards.

Everywhere men were running toward the landing to watch the arriving steamboat. She was spick, span, and new, and her name plate told us, in gold, that she was the *John J. Bealey*. She came slowly up, and in the pilot house a sneering Indian face looked out, while a man came from the side door and watched, and by his very pose of authority we knew that we were looking at Captain Hard, the new master, whose fame had preceded him from the upper reaches of the Missouri River, where he had captained a packet in days when wandering Sioux took pot shots at the smokestacks, and pilot houses were lined with sheet iron.

Shortly afterward, as she approached the shore, a man with a gray, pointed beard and a tourist cap sauntered out, and was followed by a short, stocky man, whose temples were sufficiently gray to be noted from where we stood.

"Whew!" said a voice at my side, which I recognized as belonging to Shakespeare George. "The law has come at last, and it's to be military. I knew those men back in Wyoming. That is Colonel Day, of the Sixteenth Cavalry, and Captain Dickinson, of the Eighth. Going up the river, I suppose."

Whatever conjectures he had were cut short by the uproar of the crowd on the bank demanding whether the steamer had food for the trading post. The cry for food was again arising, and this time it was menacing.

The captain, who was making his first trip, walked stodgily to the edge of the hurricane deck, and, as if sensing the anxiety of the crowd, spoke to the nearest man on the bank, who happened to be none other than Travers.

"I'm afraid not," he answered. "We'll have to see later. Don't be in too big a hurry."

The crowd stood in sullen silence as this reply came to it in full force. All but Travers, whom we saw shouldering his way back to where Howard, small, set, and, with hat pulled over his eyes, stood alone. They talked together, and I lost sight of them for the moment in my eagerness to see the gangplank thrust out its length and the hurrying natives begin carrying off whatever was to be discharged.

George trudged on down the bank, and waited for Colonel Day and Captain Dickinson to land. They recognized him and shook hands enthusiastically, and began exchanging questions and answers, while the other Competents, after being introduced, stood behind and took no part in the conversation.

I was first made aware that something unexpected was happening when I saw that a group of men, with Travers in the lead, had passed up the gangplank and were talking to Captain Hard, who had come down to the main deck and was standing at the foot of the stairs. With boyish curiosity aglow, I left The Competents and went aboard the boat, where I could catch snatches of the conversation, and crowded still farther inward to listen. Travers, in his deep voice, was expostulating.

"I know you are not the company," he said, "but that has nothing to do with it. You are a man. You have lived on

the edge of things and you understand. We have no supplies here. You admit this is the last steamer up. We've hung on here while the company kept telling us we should be supplied. Now we are told that it's impossible and that everything you have aboard must go through to Dawson. We are just as important. We don't exactly see why the company should now warn us to get out and down the river, or starve, while Dawson gets fed."

The captain, who was a thin-faced man, firm-jawed, and calm-eyed, looked from man to man as if appraising them before answering.

"See here," he said; "I know how it is, boys; but I've got no authority. I'm no more than the captain of this steamboat. All her food is billed through to Dawson. There's no use in arguing, because I'm going to take it there, if I can."

After this precise statement he turned away, leaving an angry and discouraged group.

Travers and Howard stood for a moment, looking blankly at each other, and then the latter gave a long, soft whistle.

"Whew!" he said, wiping his forehead in a way he had when perplexed. "Looks like a slim chance, doesn't it?"

But Travers did not answer for a moment. I saw that his face was dark and flushed, as if the blood that had been traveling placidly for so long was mounting upward.

"We've got to have it," he said, and then leaned forward and whispered something I did not hear.

Howard again gave a whistle, but this time it had a different note, and sounded to me like an expression of astonishment. He backed off and looked at his big partner for a moment, and then said: "All right! It goes for me. Count me in!"

They sauntered back across the gangplank and up to where Tom and Tim were standing near George, who was still exchanging reminiscences with the officers, and Travers literally buttonholed them. I did not follow them. I was too much interested in the scene aboard; too much engrossed in studying Captain Hard, who walked backward and forward with a sullen face, swearing to himself at times and then looking out at the disconsolate loungers on the shore, ragged, unkempt, and despairing. Once he burst into speech.

"Poor devils!" he exclaimed, "wish I could help 'em! Poor devils! Wish I could!"

The captain took but a part of my attention, for his pilot, Curley Charley, well known, took the other portion. He lounged easily against the hog chains. He was supposed to be the best native pilot on the Yukon. It had advanced him from a hunter, chasing perigrinating caribou, wandering bear, and smaller animals, or a wood cutter at ten yards of turkey-red calico and a pot-metal ax per cord, to the most affluent man of the Taninaw tribe—affluence that is measured by five silver dollars a day.

He was grotesque. Some trace of mixed blood sauntered through his sluggish veins, for his straight Indian hair had kinky waves. He was dressed as became his importance. He wore white man's trousers turned high, in imitation of some globe-galloping Englishman of Dawson. He had an old Southern Pacific Railway conductor's cap. He wore shoes that some one had abandoned, and the previous owner's taste and characteristics were indelibly stamped upon them from their very size to the bulging places painfully stretched by bunions. They were of patent-leather vamps with tan tops and large pearl buttons. For a coat he wore a mackinaw that was more gorgeous than a black pugilist's smile. He smoked tailor-made cigarettes, and ostentatiously sported a brass ring with a large glass "diamond" in it. His scent was wafted downward now and then by the fastidious, fresh breeze from the wilderness, a scent of trading-post cologne lavishly employed.

I saw The Competents, Travers and Howard, walking away with the officers toward "Bevin's Place," and surmised they were going to exchange a different hospitality; but I was surprised when, still talking earnestly, they took another

direction and were lost around a jutting corner of a cabin.

The native wood carriers had heaped the spaces around the boiler room with wood, piled tier on tier, to the steamer's bows. The mate looked up at Captain Hard, who was still holding his solitary promenade, and shouted:

"All on, sir!"

The captain took another slow, wistful, and sympathetic look at the men who lined the shore, then turned and made a signal to Curley Charley, who was nonchalantly leaning out of the pilot-house window with the air of being more than monarch of all he surveyed. Charley stepped backward, and the whistle of the *Bealey* yelled a warning that all passengers must come aboard and that those who were not passengers must disembark.

I turned with the others who were heading shoreward, and went down the teetering gangplank and joined the grim-faced men on the beach.

The smoke from the *Bealey* was welling upward from her stacks in an increasing volume, and multifarious sounds belched from her interior—the rattle of pans in the galley; the good-natured, sometimes rough, shouts of men parting company; the mutterings of the natives on the boiler deck.

I heard a noise behind me—no, I am not sure of that; but my attention was at last drawn that way by the movements of the crowd of despairing ones who, in their ragged mackinaws, battered caps, and worn mukluks, thronged the river's bank. Toward us there came running the ex-Yale stroke, the exponent of law and order, and behind him, with head bent and arms at his sides, came Lee Howard, the taciturn.

"Stop!" Travers called. "Stop! Don't throw off that line!"

The man who had been unbending it from its snubbing post paused and looked up. Travers was staring at him. He started to resume his task. The captain, as if sensing impending trouble, volleyed orders at him, mixed with oaths. There was the sharp snip of a revolver, and the man at the line straightened up. Travers had fired a shot above his head.

A deck hand who, obeying Captain Hard's orders, had leaped to the bank and run forward, cast off the line at the *Bealey's* bow. She began to edge away from the shore. Travers had gained the side of the man at the stern line, who had hesitated. The steamer's nose caught the lagging shoreward current, and swung out with her stern as a pivot. The gangplank parted with the shore and dragged, half floating, in the side wake. The mate on deck started to cut the stern line with an ax, but Travers' voice bellowed at him:

"Stand clear with that ax, or I'll kill you! Don't any of you go near that line, or I'll shoot. I will! I'll kill the man that touches it."

It seemed to me as if all in an instant the whole scene had changed from one of gloomy quietude to feverish turmoil. The men on the bank were stirring restlessly, wildly, and some of them were surging toward Travers, who, a giant, bulked large on the bank behind the cowed man at the snubbing post. He was the realization of mastery. He stood with his feet planted wide, and in his hand was a gun. His hat was set squarely down over his forehead, and the whole suggestion was one of relentless and desperate might. The crowd on the river bank had become his minions, eager to accept a leadership.

"Boys," he called to them, "this is the last steamer up. She must give us food. Are you with me?"

The hoarse shout that went up bespoke their allegiance.

The *Bealey* swung farther out into the stream. She leaned slightly to the current as it struck her, broadside, and the stern line came taut and hard, as high strung as a violin string. She eased away, and began her pivotal course downstream. It was plain that she would beach herself, bow on, where she could be boarded.

The second shot of that crisis snapped through the air, and in front of the pilot house and close to the edge of the hurricane deck stood Curley

Charley, with a smoking rifle in his hand.

There were shouts of "Look out! Look out, Travers!" But Travers had already heard the high-pitched crescendo of the bullet past his ears, and was frowning at the pilot.

"Don't do that again," he shouted, "or I'll shoot back!"

A man in the crowd ran madly out of the danger zone. It was Carter, the belligerent!

Curley Charley, anxious to show zeal, whipped the rifle to his shoulder, and fired again. Travers ducked his head, instinctively and uselessly, and then, as if by a single motion, brought his pistol up and shot. Shot once only, Curley Charley turned, staggered, dropped his rifle, and plunged forward. Captain Hard endeavored to catch him; but he slipped past his grip too quickly and toppled over the edge of the hurricane deck. He fell, whirling and limp, into the river, and the water sent up a splash and a wave.

"Get him, some of you," Travers yelled. "Get him! Don't let him be carried away!"

The Competents had arrived, and Shakespeare George plunged into the water.

I ran down to the bank and waded in after my benefactors. The river caught me below the arms with a sweeping, threatening grip. I hesitated, and in that moment George reappeared and came toward me with the native in his arms. We laid him out on the bank, and saw that he had regained consciousness. We tore open his shirt, and found that the forty-five ball had plowed into his shoulder with a stunning blow, but that the wound was not fatal.

When we looked up, the *Bealey* had swung almost against the bank, with her nose downstream, and the man who had endeavored to cast off the stern line still stood with his hand and arm raised, as if to shield his head from Travers, who stood above him.

"Now, boys! Board her!" Travers shouted, and the men of Yukon swept down toward the *Bealey's* side. They waded through water waist-deep, and began clambering aboard. I stood, an excited spectator, on the bank, and The Competents were by me and took no part. They exchanged glances, wise, and grinning, as if they had been forewarned.

The native crew, dreading the menace of Travers, who was in the vanguard of the attack, cringed and broke for the bow of the boat. The onslaught was like those of the freebooters of old in the Spanish Main when they charged, reckless fighting men, all, over the sides of their prey. Captain Hard alone met the advance. From the upper deck men looked down over the rail, leaning far outward, but offering no participation, making no defense of the *John J. Bealey*, which was at the mercy of an invasion. Their sympathies were doubtless with those men below who were fighting for food, for life, for a chance to remain and wrestle with Fortune in the land of dreams and gold.

A small, wiry, and ragged man arose, dripping, over the steamer's side. Hard waited till he was almost aboard before he struck, and then my view resolved itself into a group of striking, swirling, straining figures. Fists rose and fell. Arms in motion crowned the group. Straining, tense legs were massed below. Caps flew off. There were curses and shouts, and, high above all, the hoarse, commanding voice of Travers, the ex-Yale man, the man of law and order, shouting:

"Don't hurt him! Hold him down! Hold him down! Don't let him strike. Get his arms, some of you! Down with him!"

The group suddenly went to the deck, for all the world like a "down" in a fiercely contested game of football. It slowly disintegrated. From the very bottom they lifted Captain Hard, "bloody but unbowed." They stood holding him, panting and wiping their wet brows, and through it all a slow grin crept over his face. It was almost triumphant. It was joyful. Travers was in front of him.

"I trust," he said, "that we shall not have to kill you, captain? You've done

damage enough, it looks to me. You've had your bite of dog."

He looked around at his supporters, many of whom bore marks of the captain's efficacy.

"No," Hard answered, "I've done my best to protect the company's rights. What are you going to do now?"

Travers replied as calmly as if there had been no personal altercation:

"Going to do? We're going to take enough food from the *Bealey* to run us."

I could not but admire his stalwart leadership, nor the stalwart obedience accorded him. The men of Yukon threw open the hatches of the shallow hold. They formed a line of carriers. At the head of the gangplank, which had been recovered, and at its foot, stood two men, four in all, who checked the commandeered cargo. A man with a sack of flour on his back started toward the shore.

"Tally one," came a shout. "Aye, tally one," came an answer from his companion. "Tally one," from the shore end of the plank, and "Tally one," like an echo.

The stream of men forged up the bank to a building that had been chosen as a warehouse. They carried nothing but crude, raw supplies, until Travers was satisfied. A pyramid of bacon, flour, and beans had accumulated outside before he gave the order to stop. The Yukon men deserted the *Bealey* as if by common consent.

"Now, captain," Travers said, "we pay. Pay in gold. It's taken by the company at sixteen an ounce, but we allow it to go at fifteen to make sure of fairness."

We all followed as Captain Hard was escorted to "Bevin's Place," where the gold scales were dragged out, pokes thrown in a heap, and the talliers' scores made up. Captain Hard stood by, and at last, when the full amount of dust was weighed, declared himself.

"Understand," he said, "that you are all pirates and should be hanged. I'll do my best to see to it, just as I did to protect the company's property. I take this under protest, and ask you all to witness it."

They stared at one another in glumness for a moment, and then some one asked: "But who are you going to bring a charge against? Who do you hold responsible, as leader?"

He caught the significance of the question, and looked grave for a moment. The room was very still as we all hung on his words.

"How is my pilot?" he asked.

"Got his wound dressed, and been put back aboard the boat," George answered. "He's all right. Nasty flesh wound, but not serious."

The captain smiled.

"It seems to me," he said, a little relieved, "that I miss the officers who represent federal authority in Alaska. I can't seem to remember everything at once. What has become of them?"

"By the lord high mucka-muck of Timbuktu!" exclaimed Tom Evans, "I believe I accidentally locked them in Sinclair's storehouse, where there isn't a window and where the door is double thick, before this row started. I certainly am sorry for that and must go and let them out right now."

"Then," said Captain Hard, "all I can say is, I did my best to protect the company's property and to obey orders; but I don't just exactly remember who it was that attacked me. I don't believe I could identify the individual who led it. Of course, if any of you ever find out, you can write to the company. We might as well be friends, boys. What'll you have?"

And when they started aboard the *Bealey*, Travers, Howard, and Captain Hard walked side by side, talking about the chances of an early freeze, and behind them came two army officers and The Competents, chuckling together, and exchanging comments. And as the *Bealey* finally cleared herself and started upstream, she did a most strange thing for the victim of a raid; she pulled her throttle wide and gave a serious attempt at a jocund crow, and Captain Hard, battered, but grinning, stood at the whistle valve and worked it up and down

Mr. Sweeny: Treasure Hunter

By Charles R. Barnes

Author of "On the Sweeny Wire," "Mrs. Sweeny's Speech," Etc.

"Would you wish for to hear a story with treasure in it that's some out of the ordinary?" asks Mrs. Sweeny. Then listen to this exciting tale of how the Sweenys went in search of a buried safe—a little iron safe that contained much treasure

DISAPPOINTMENT came into Mrs. Sweeny's face. In a burst of temper, she pitched the magazine she had been reading into a far corner of the room. At that instant, the Boarder tapped at the door.

"Come in," she called, and he entered. And, noting her look, he inquired its cause.

"Nobody never makes good," she exclaimed, eying the magazine in disgust. "The money alwus gets by, in them stories."

"What stories?"

"Buried-treasure stories," she explained. "Here I get all fussed up because a bunch of sailors has located a million dollars at the bottom of the ocean. But they's alwus a curse on pirate gold, and just as they get their mitts on it, *bing!*—stick in another film, Maurice!"

The Boarder laughed.

"The conventional treasure story," said he. "They are always written that way."

"But I don't like it," she protested. "I like to be slammed up against a winner—everybody loves a winner. You dig me up a pirate-gold story where the hicks get away with it, and I'll give you a week free in the rooms you're rentin' of me. What?"

Again the Boarder laughed.

"You like sure-thing propositions, don't you?" he taunted.

"Oh, I don't know," she came back; "I don't know. Would you wish for to hear a story with treasure in it that's some out of the ordinary?"

The Boarder seated himself. He knew that he would be more or less entertained for the next half hour or so; and he told this bookmaker's widow that he was in a mood to be attentive. So she began:

"One summer, about a year before my poor dead Danny was shot, me and him and Three-fingered Kelly and Mrs. Three Fingers had a seven-room bungaloo out on the Coney Island shore. You know where the wireless tower is—the Seagate station?"

No, the Boarder was not familiar with the place.

"Well," Mrs. Sweeny resumed, "it don' matter. Plenty of people do, and if you get curious, you can ask somebody. I ain't got time to stop and teach g'og'aphy when I'm tellin' a story. So, just remember that we was on the ocean shore, close up toward the Narrows. Us four was chaperoons for a feller named Waite, that was city editor of some newspaper, and for Big Mike Stevens' daughter, Nadine. Ain't that a swell name, mister?"

"It has a nice sound," he agreed.

"Sure it has," she echoed. "And the girl was as nice as her name. She was about twenty and as pretty as them pitchers of ladies on cigar-box lids. Her hair was a kinda real dark red, and her skin was white like a barkeep's apern, fresh back from the laundry. Then there was them pretty blue eyes of hern. Believe me, mister, I didn't blame that young Waite none for actin' like he did. Why, w'en that girl would pour herself into her bathin' suit, it

was time for the feller that first thought up the word 'beauty' to think up a fresh one. She was a dream come true—a song canned, as you might say. Big Mike had sent her out to us because she wasn't very well. But after a week of the salt water she was as healthy as a cop, and et like a starved hodcarrier.

"Young Waite went in to work every day, but I guess what city editin' he done wasn't no good example to the force. He was flitty in his wit cabinet about that girl. And he wasn't no fool, neither. The feller was tall and strong and real quick in his head. Folks has got to be brainy to run them big newspapers, I guess; and Tommy Waite was. But all them brains of his might as well of been pickled tripe, for all the good they done when he was walkin' or swimmin' with Nadine. W'y, she had him so hypnotized that he'd of tried to walk on the water, if she'd told him to. Then, too, he had his worries.

" 'Mis Sweeny,' he says to me one time, 'I'd put the marry gag up to her in a minute,' he says, 'but I feel like a smutty deuce.'

" 'Che-ild,' I says, 'w'isper it to Aunt Lizzie,' I says.

" 'It's the money part of it,' he says, lookin' troubleder than a heathen in clothes. You see, mister, Big Mike owned as many horses as there is beads on a string, and they'd galloped home a lot of money to him. And he liked to plaster it on that lovely doll of his. Miss Nadine had just about everything she wanted.

" 'And me,' Tommy went on, 'I ain't saved a cent. My salary would keep that dame in powder puffs,' he said, 'if she was careful spendin' it and only went out bargain days,' he says, 'and where am I at, anyway?' "

Mrs. Sweeny paused for the Boarder to assimilate the situation. In a moment she was at her story again.

"Of course, me and Danny and Three Fingers and the Mrs. was sorry. This here Three Fingers was oncet a burglar, but even them people has got feelin's. And he let the case get on his chest so hard that he stopped tellin' us yarns of safes he'd broke before he turned honest and took up race-track gamblin'; and he talks of nothin' all the time, but what about them two young folks? You see, as the days went on, anybody could see that Nadine wasn't thinkin' of herself altogether, like girls does. When it came time for Tommy Waite to show up, she'd kinda stroll out toward Surf Avenoo and be real supprised when he dropped off the trolley car. We all seen this, and we knew the little mutt with the repeatin' bow gun was a-shootin' in bull's-eye form."

The Boarder ventured to ask:

"Who?"

"Coopid," she serenely replied. "The little feller's got desk room on every beach you ever heard of; and he stirred up about the only excitement we had, playin' them young people against each other. There was a burglary and murder in a millionaire's summer home, but we soon forgot it. Some fellers broke in, hit the watchman over the head, and run off with a little safe full of money. And, gee! it got Three Fingers excited, for the men was caught. It was all we could do to keep him from pullin' off a real classy job, just to prove to the public that his old profession was still to be respected. But we persuaded him that, bein' a' alumni, or alum somethin', it wouldn't be playin' the game fair. So he stayed in the evenin' pinochle game with us, and took it out in longin'.

"One day, toward the end of the summer, Tommy come out from town all fussed up. He kept lookin' at Nadine in a kinda hopeful way, and then he'd set and figger. We knew that there was somethin' the matter; but it didn't come out till after dinner, when we was all loafin' round on the veranda, that give a fine view off over the ocean. Then, all at once, Tommy speaks up.

" 'Folks,' he says, 'I got a new record for the machine. Want to hear it?' he says.

"We sure did, and told him so.

" 'Well,' he says, 'they sentenced Red Waters to the chair to-day.'

"Red was one of the men that had jimmied into the millionaire's house. He had been on trial for killin' the watchman. Tommy went on to tell us that after the judge had let go of his idees about what was comin' to the pris'ner, Red had sent for Tommy.

"'I knew the feller,' says Tommy, 'when I was a police reporter. Once I got him out of jail where he was put for somethin' he didn't do. And several times he helped me on slum stories. But I've told you all this before,' he says. 'Red said he sent for me because he guessed I was the only man in New York,' he says, 'that he could trust.'

"While Tommy was talkin', he kept fingerin' a piece of paper like it was a real important thing.

"'I talked with the man in his cell,' says he, 'and he told me to get a' envelope that a barkeep in Ninth Avenoo was holdin' for him. This was in it.' Tommy held up the paper. 'After I finished talkin' to him, I went round and got the paper. And I want all of you to help me work out what it stands for,' he says. .

"I tell you, mister," Mrs. Sweeny observed with great solemnity, "we was as excited as a lady that means to throw somethin'. Here was a paper from a real robber and man-killer, and we was all in on somethin' of some kind that was meant by it. And while Tommy went on with his story, we had a look at it; but there was just a few lines and some words I couldn't quite make out, the writin' was so scrawly, so it didn't tell me nothin'.

"'Red gave me the story of the crime,' says the young feller. 'There were three of them in it and a girl what worked at the millionaire's as hired help. She was in love with one of the gang; and it was through her that they learned that money was goin' to be in the house—a hunderd thousand—all in stuff that you could spend. Not stocks or tradin' stamps nor nothin' like that. It was real money. And the funny part of it was that they was goin' to bribe a crooked judge with it.'"

Mrs. Sweeny waited until she felt that the full import of this information had sunk home before resuming.

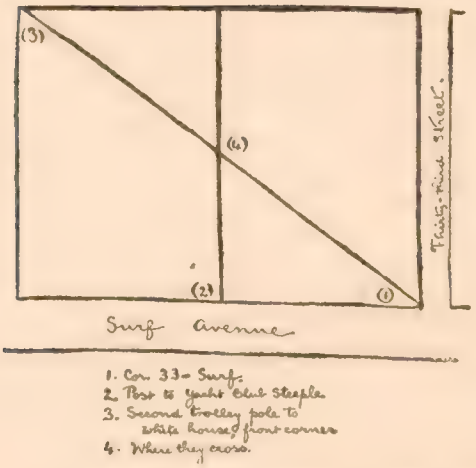
"Tommy goes on to tell us," she said, "that the girl had been out late one night, down to Coney Island, and was tryin' to sneak in through a getaway window she had left open, when she heard two men talkin', and crowded herself in a dark corner till they should quit and go away. It was her boss and a feller that had come that day to visit. They talked a long time, and the girl's boss finally says that the money will be there to-morrow night, and she heard 'em sayin' things about some decision. She didn't understand it. All she knew was that money was comin', and she knew how much.

"The next day she let her feller know. She left a window open for the gang, and they got in, banged a special watchman over the head, and heaved the safe out of a window. It was a little one, like express companies use. They got it to a wagon that was waitin', and started away. But lights flashed up all over the house, folks run out, and they was seen. So, when they'd lammed their horse along for about half a mile, they dumped the safe out, sent the horse gallopin' away with a empty wagon, and carried the iron box into a big vacant lot.

"When he got this far, Tommy stood up, and walked to the corner of the veranda.

"'There's the place,' he says, pointin' to what was almost a field, with a big 'Lots for Sale' sign on it. 'They managed to find a shovel by huntin' back of some cottages, and they buried the safe there, meanin' to come back when times wasn't so ticklish and get it. Then they sighted here and there, takin' such things as they could see in the dark, made maps, and lit out. They was caught later.'

"The paper Tommy had was beginnin' to look like sense to us, mister, and you can bet that none of us was takin' after-dinner naps. As near as I can remember, the thing had this on it." She procured paper and pencil, and soon had evolved her illustration, which is here given:



"It meant," Mrs. Sweeny went on, "that the little safe was planted in a vacant lot at Thirty-third Street and Surf Avenue. You had to take sights from a post to the Ocean Yacht Club tower, and from a trolley pole to a house. Where they crossed was it."

"H'm," muttered the Boarder. Mrs. Sweeny looked at him, annoyed.

"Is that the best you can do?" she asked. "If it is, I'm glad you wasn't along. W'y, my Danny says—well, I won't tell you what he said, bein' a lady. Nadine sinks back in her chair. I says: 'My gosh!' and Three Fingers hollers to the smoke lady that done the cookin' for to go steal a spade, us not havin' one. Tommy just stood there, lookin' at Nadine, and her a-lookin' back at him, funny like. I guess the same bunch of thinks was on the job in both of their heads. A hundred thousand dollars is a lot of money to a poor skate that has the marry bug and nothing for fodder.

"After we'd got cooled down a bit, Tommy tells us that Red had offered him all that money, if he would dig it up and give Red's wife a fourth of it. And it was here that he trusted Tommy, for there wasn't nothin' to keep him from gettin' it and keepin' it all."

"How about the other men?" asked the Boarder. "Hadn't they tried to get it?"

"They wasn't supposed to," Mrs. Sweeny answered. "You see, the three of 'em had went into a' agreement to wait till after their trials before takin' any action. And this here case is a good example of honor among thieves. The party that said such a thing must of been charged up with hop. My Danny usta say that if them thieves has got any honor they stole it and are leadin' it to the nearest 'fence,' which is a place where swiped stuff is sold. But let me get this story off my chest.

"Tommy says: 'Le's all go there now,' he says, 'and look the place over.' And so we make a getaway and walks over to the avenoo and across it, w'ere the big, vacant lot was. It didn't look like a party was goin' to find anything there but tin cans and pieces of stove-pipe. The ground was dug up in places, where they had been gradin' it, and there was a good deal of rubbish layin' loose. The first thing Tommy done was to stand by that post and sight at the yacht-club steeple. Then he turns to Three Fingers.

"'Go down there to that trolley pole,' he says, 'and get the sight on the house,' he says. 'Then I'll walk out along this line, and you holler when you get me between you and the house,' he says.

"'You're on,' says Three Fingers, and Tommy starts.

"The rest of us stood there, holdin' our breaths like a couple of horses was neck-and-neckin' it home. Tommy walks slow, my Danny sightin' over the post and hollerin' when the young feller gets off the line.

"Pretty soon Three Fingers lets out a yell. Tommy stopped and looked at the ground. By and by he begun walkin' round in circles that got wider and wider. At last he stopped. We seen him bendin' over for mebby a minute, and then he stood up, turned toward us, and held up one hand. I heard Miss Nadine catch her breath quick.

"'He's found it!' she whispers, grabbin' my arm. Nobody moved, for we didn't want to attract any more attention than we could help. Tommy hunted round till he found a stick, which he pushed into the ground. Then he come back to us.

"'Somethin' is planted there, all right,' he says, lookin' at Nadine. He

talked low, and you could tell that he was kinda tensed.

"'Then we'll dig it up,' says Three Fingers.

"'We will,' says Danny, 'to-night,' he says.

"'Yes,' says Tommy, 'to-night.'

"And so we all marched back to the bungaloo, solemn as a pusson drowndin' a dog, and we sits up, watchin' each other's faces, kinda awed. Danny was so excited he near run our smoke lady off her feet, fetchin' him iced drinks. And w'en I warned him, he says: 'Belle, I don't care if I do get gastritis. This here is a' occasion, and it must be ushered in proper and befittin',' he says. And, as Three Fingers doped it out that Danny had the right idea, I didn't have nothin' more to say. I s'pose you never went diggin' for treasure, mister?"

"No," the Boarder answered, "I never had that pleasure."

"Pleasure!" Mrs. Sweeny exclaimed, "it ain't what you'd call pleasure. It's like fallin' downstairs, and goin' to be hung to-morruh, and sittin' up nights for your husban' all rolled into one. There's more sensation in diggin' for treasure than there is in watchin' a race or a baseball game or holdin' four aces. You keep askin' yourself: 'Is it there or is the bunch stung?'

"And in this case, it was putticilar tickly, because there wasn't one of us that wasn't dead sure that Red's partners had told their fr'en's to get busy, same as he'd done. If one crook would double-cross his pals, it was good reasonin' to figger that the pals wasn't no better. But Tommy was real hopeful. He said that the ground didn't look like it had been disturbed lately. Grass had grew there, Tommy says, and, if Red's pals' fr'en's had been there for to rescue the money, then they'd did it a long time ago.

"Well, we all set round till it was almost midnight, and everything was still. Then we gets a rope, and Three Fingers digs up one of them winkin' flash lights that so many s'ciety men carries with 'em to find the keyhole at night. Our smoke lady had borried us a spade from a gen'm'n fr'en' of hers that was night porter to a little hotel near our bungaloo; and, bein' fixed for the night's work, we sets out for that vacant lot. W'e-e-e! It makes me shiver yet, w'en I think of it. Day work for mine, mister. Don't you never take no night jobs."

The Boarder promised, in all good faith, to abide by her advice.

"We waited out there on the corner of the lot," she went on, "with the spade and rope hid down between Mrs. Three Fingers' skirts and mine, till the policeman on post went by. Then we went along slow, as if we was just cross-cuttin' through that lot; and by the time we got to the stick that Tommy had set up, the cop feets was beatin' the sidewalk 'way up the avenoo. My Danny lit a match, and we all looked down at the ground. Sure enough, mister, there was a kinda bumpy place there. Tommy grabbed the spade.

"'This is the place,' he says, and he begins to dig quick and hopeful, like a city man makin' garden. The rest of us gathers up around him.

"'Tommy,' I says, 'for the love of Mike——'

"'W'at?' says he, stoppin'.

"'Nothin',' I says, 'but if you don't make good, I'll have the coon put paris green in your soup,' I says, bein' so excited I could of swallered my gum. Nadine put in.

"'This isn't a joke?' she ast.

"Tommy didn't say nothin' to that, but went back workin' like he was ten wops bein' driv' by a gang boss. Three Fingers flashed his light every little bit, and him and Danny set up a line of argument, Three Fingers offerin' five to four that Tommy wouldn't dig up nothin'. And they kep' it up till Danny had six hundred on that safe comin' out of the hole. He'd of went to a thousand, if I wouldn't of w'ispered that the smoke lady had trotted a good many heats buttween the ice box and him. That made him cautious, and he was makin' hedge bets, w'en, all at once, Tommy's spade made a kinda screechy noise on somethin'. I jumps forward.

" 'W'at is it?' I says.

"Tommy is breathin' hard, but it wasn't all from the work. He straightened up and looked from one to the other of us, slow and funny.

" 'I've struck the safe,' he says. 'It's here, all right!'

"Nobody said nothin'. We just stood there and stared at the hole, Three Fingers holdin' his winker down close in it. There sure was iron there, all right; and it was all gleamy in strips, where the spade had scratched it. In a minnit Danny whispers, hoarse and excited:

" 'Go on, kid; dig it out!'

"Tommy went to work again, this time diggin' round the sides of the thing. The winkin' light showed him where to jab the spade, and he was goin' to it like a hungry tramp to a hand-out. Mrs. Three Fingers was breathin' like the original wheeze.

" 'Go to it, hon!' she gasps. 'If this turns out to be bunk, I do a flop right here!' she says.

"Miss Nadine had catched me by the shoulder and was just hangin' on. Believe me, mister, the whole police force and all the Coney Island bally-hoo men announcin' them, wouldn't of disturbed us. We couldn't hear nothin' but the gratin' of that spade, and we couldn't see nothin' 'cept the iron box, that, by this time, was all uncovered. It sure was there. So far, Red's information had came true, but we didn't know yet whether they was anything in it or not."

"Was there?" asked the Boarder, who showed deep interest.

"That," said Mrs. Sweeny, "is what I'm comin' to. You see, the whole business was gettin' interestiner than a movin'-pitcher show. The safe was there, all right, but what was inside it couldn't of been told by the best clairvoyant in New York. Them pals of Red's might of came some time and took everything, leavin' the safe. We didn't know; and we was mighty worked up about it, I can tell you. And when the thing was clear dug up, them men was pretty quick about slippin' the rope round it. Then everybody catched hold of that line, and we drug the safe out of the lot and across the street. In a few minutes we had it the rest of the distance to the bungaloo and inside.

" 'Pull down all the curtings," orders Danny, 'and stop up the keyhole. We can't have this spoiled by some one rammin' in now,' he says.

"We done that, mister, and then we all draws back, and up steps Three Fingers, with a proud look on his face. For here was a chance for him to show off his class as a safe opener. You see, none of us knowed how to set the combination knob, so we'd of been as helpless as them babies in the tall timber. But Three Fingers was on the job; and so we stood there admirin'ly, as he goes confident at the little iron box with a 'I-got-your-number-kid' look in his eyes.

" 'Ladies and gents,' says he, 'this is a happy time for me. The t'rills of my dangerous former callin',' he says, 'is ripplin' in my blood. If they was a' 'lectric-light wire handy,' he says, 'I'd show you some classy work, burnin' off the combinash. But they ain't none,' he says, 'and likewise I ain't got no stethoscope for a dem'nstration of up-to-date listinin' for them tumblers to drop. But,' he says, 'watch me go to it!'

"And with them words, mister, he gets down beside the safe and puts his ear against the front of it. Then he begins, slow and careful, to turn the combination knob. We're all standin' over him, breathless as a dead hen. He worked there mebby two or three minutes, and we was tore with anxiety for fear he wouldn't make good, when all of a sudden he give a quick turn of the knob and it wouldn't go no farther. Then he turned the handle and the door swinged open."

Mrs. Sweeny's expression suddenly pictured annoyance.

"Mister," she said, "all day long I'll be sorry for them folks in the story I just read. They almost got that treasure, and then was stung. Why couldn't they of made good? W'at would you think of me if I had set here and turned loose a face full of language, with nothin' doin' at the end——"

The Boarder put up his hand.

"Mrs. Sweeny," he sternly asked, "what was in that safe?"

"W'y," she replied, in surprise, "a hunderd thousand dollars was in it. What did you s'pose was in it? I'll have you know, mister, that I ain't a lady to take up your time with a line of yip that you'd wish I'd kept in storage."

She rocked back and forth for a moment, while the Boarder sank back in his chair and proceeded to appear relieved. Then she put the finishing touches to her story.

"Tommy," she concluded, "bein' a' editor, was on the inside of a lot of things. He knew what the deal was about that the judge was to get that hunderd thousand for—it was somethin' about a railroad suit over some sort of a special priv'lege, but I never could get it through my head right. But Tommy put two and two together, and he calls on that Mr. Thomas, the millionaire whose house was robbed, and offered to return the money.

"At first Thomas was scared that it would get in the papers—about the bribery and the judge, you know, and he said he didn't lose no money. But after a while he admitted that the safe and what was in it was took from his house. And the end of it was that Red's widow lady got what Red wanted her to. And Tommy got ten thousand for bein' honest. And old Thomas got to thinkin' so much of him that he offered ten thousand a year for Tommy to quit the newspaper business and be head of the publicity department of that railroad. That wasn't such a bad turnin' out for a night's work, was it?"

"No," replied the Boarder.

For a moment there was silence. Then Mrs. Sweeny asked: "Why don't you ask me what's Nadine's name now?"

The Boarder laughed.

"Because," he answered, "I don't consider it necessary."

"Well," she commented, "once in a while you're almost intelligent."

HITCHCOCK'S HUNGRY RAIDERS

THE evening following the famous raid of the post-office department on the big brokerage firm of Burr Brothers, in New York, Postmaster-general Hitchcock received the newspaper men in his hotel room to give them any information they desired about the raid. He paid a high tribute to the ten picked inspectors who had pulled off the job, and then stood leaning against a door for a long time, answering the questions fired at him.

When the reporters had left, he said:

"I haven't had a bite to eat for more than twelve hours."

He stepped into the next room, where the inspectors were waiting.

"You fellows hungry?" he asked.

"A little," replied one of them.

"A lot!" said another. "None of us has had a mouthful for the past twenty-four hours."

Whereupon, Hitchcock and his ten terrible raiders went to a restaurant, and ate nearly everything the place had in readiness.

BRANDEIS: ECONOMY TEACHER

LOUIS D. BRANDEIS, who claims he can show the railroads of the country how to save one million dollars a day in operating expenses, has been sarcastically called "The Teacher of Economy." But he practices what he preaches. Although he is one of the wealthiest men in Boston, he lives in a severely simple style, and reserves for himself the "pleasure" of serving many clients for nothing, thus promoting economy for a lot of other people.

An Enemy to Society

By George Bronson-Howard

Author of "Norroy, Diplomatic Agent," "Scars on the Southern Seas," Etc.

PART NINE.

RENUNCIATION

SNOW had begun to fall; first, sifting like fine powder on black roofs and chimneys; later, filling up the yawning excavations consequent on Manhattan's continual rebuilding, packing itself in tight, compact masses on the slanting panes of studios, and causing slender flagpoles on hotels and public buildings to grow clumsy beards. Where unattractive fire escapes had been there soon were velvet-carpeted ladders to the skies.

People had begun to grow merry in the streets. Boys blew tin horns as reminders that Christmas was near. The holiday turkeys became cold and firm to the touch. The holly berries in the market places glistened, red hearts of white stars set against fields of green. One could hardly find the mistletoe at all amid so much whiteness.

Winter weather, Christmas weather, Dickens weather; the weather to rejoice the true Norse and Angle, creating as it does the atmosphere making for that country of illusion where the Yule log ever burns brightly and the Christmas tree never dies.

It did not appeal to Morganstein, for he was an Oriental by nature, and shivered under his fur coat even though the astrakhan collar was turned up about his ears. But to George Le Fay it brought memories of old Normandy, or perhaps of the streets of Paris, where, in another age, he had crawled along the snowy moat, a prudent counselor to a foolhardy Villon.

He did not know why he had been summoned to the House of the Dominie, but words had passed over the wire from Axtell—a code agreed upon—which he was bound to obey; although his evening game of chess with his neighbor, the proprietor of a haberdashery and most respectable, had been rudely interrupted, much to his vexation. In like manner, Morganstein, who sat each evening poring over ancient tomes detailing the experiments of Raymond Tully, Albertus Magnus, and Friar Bacon—for he had always contended that the old alchemists knew more of precious metals and stones than any one else—had been incommoded, and was also making his way, unwillingly, through the snowy streets. It so happened that, coming in opposite directions, they met at the front steps of their rendezvous.

"Rich, this!" growled George Le Fay. "Got any idea what it's all about, Morgy?"

"You're like the old dame in the play that kept wonderin' what was in the telegram she hadn't opened," returned Morganstein ungraciously, as he fitted a pass-key into the front-door lock.

George followed, his thoughts still among the maneuvers of red and black chessmen; the adventures of knights, pawns, and queens.

The bright patch of orange red, where the fire leaped and gleamed briskly in the second floor front, drove

This story began in the first March number. Back numbers can be obtained through any news dealer.

all other thoughts from the minds of the new arrivals, who, their coats still upon their backs, stripped off their gloves and warmed their hands over the blaze. Turning their faces from it presently, they observed that not only was Hilary present, but Rag also. Axtell's ferocity disturbed them not at all; he had wasted his superlatives on small matters, so that none remained to fitly impress his companions with a matter really disastrous.

It was rather the silence of Quackenbos and O'Brien that alarmed them; for Hilary was gazing somberly before him, seeing nothing; in spite of the fact that the pupils of his eyes—which had shrunk to pin points—showed that he had been indulging freely in the Oriental pleasure that usually banished pessimism. For pallor and fixity, O'Brien's face equaled that of the Carrara statue of "Comedy and Tragedy" flanking the ormulu clock behind them.

"We're done, dear old chaps," said Hilary, rousing himself and speaking in a frightened whisper.

"Yes; and you—all of you!—taking the old imbecile's part against me," raged Axtell, the glow of the fire upon his face giving it the only touch of Satanic diablerie that it did not itself supply. "I knew his black old heart; I knew he was a Judas, a dog that bit the hand that fed it; a crazy, traitorous old fool! And we let him sit there while we discussed our plans, thinking he didn't understand! *I* knew he was shamming. *I* didn't want him here. But *you* all said 'Poor Trompey'!"

His voice rose to a sneering shriek:

"'Poor old Trompey' indeed! You thought, because I was chained to my chair and had lost the use of my limbs, that I'd lost my brains, too, didn't you? Me, who planned this whole organization; me, the brains of the lot of you, and you wouldn't listen; me, who trained that boy from the first day I got him; trained him to be the greatest thief in the world, and trained him so he stole like other men pray. And yet I didn't *know* anything, eh? Didn't know anything? 'Poor old Trompey!' Ha! Oh, you insane fools! Well, now you'll pay for it; you'll all go up the river and break stones and pick oakum for your 'Poor old Trompeys.' They can't do anything to *me*. I'm paralyzed; they wouldn't dare imprison *me*. But *you*—you chumps, you thickheads, you sniveling, driveling fools, you'll wear striped suits and wield pickaxes and answer to a number, *you* will. Bah!"

George Le Fay felt his stomach; a sickening pain was there; a nauseous something was in his mouth. He sat down heavily. When he had come in, he was wondering whether he should have checkmated, and—— With a groan, he dismissed the game of chess from his mind. He would never finish it.

Dully Morganstein remembered that he had been sitting with stockinged feet against the gilded radiator in his apartment hotel. The copy of Friar Bacon's "Excelsis" he had left open on the little table near by. The steam heat would loosen its binding if it were there too long, and he had paid thirty-seven dollars and fifty cents for the book at auction. He wondered if the central office men would allow him a few moments to go back, put it in its oilskin cover, and replace it in his trunk.

"Van Tromp went to Janissary's, taking one of Stevey's baby shoes with him," further explained Hilary in a dull voice. "We can only imagine that he wants to turn Stephen up as a burglar and humiliate Janissary. He's evidently planned the whole thing out since he persuaded Stephen to burglarize the place, I suppose. As Axtell says, we didn't give him credit for enough sense, dear old chaps. So I rather fancy we're done."

"Yes; good and brown," echoed Morganstein. "Good and brown."

George Le Fay started to his feet.

"Van Tromp ull have to turn himself up if he turns Stephen. He stole the boy and he's the most to blame. He's got nothin' on *me;* I never stole a dollar in my life—not a dollar. They can't take *me* away from my home and wife and children. I'm a respectable citizen; I pay my taxes regular, and I lived in

one place for fifteen years. My lodge ull see I don't go to jail for what somebody else has done. I never made a single touch, not one, not one!"

"Be still, you rat!" said Morganstein coldly, pushing Le Fay back in his chair and bending over him. His Oriental eyes burned wickedly on either side of his hawk's nose, and his lean hand reached out to take George by the throat and shake him.

"You're the kind that turns State's evidence, ain't you? Now, listen to me! If you ever peep about one of us, I'll cut your heart out—un'stand? They can't send me away for more than seven years, and when I come out the world won't be no bigger'n Times Square so far as you hidin' away from me—see?"

With Morganstein's contemptuous shove, Le Fay's head struck the back of his chair heavily.

"Jest think of what I'm tellin' you now when the district attorney starts promisin' you immunity if you stool. Jest remember it's better f'r you to *serve* seven years than to croak *after* seven years! Better not forgit!"

A dry sob escaped from Rag O'Brien; he clasped his head with his hands.

"What! You, too?" sneered Morganstein.

"That's right, Morgy," shouted Axtell in evil glee. "Choke 'em, beat 'em, kick 'em, strangle 'em. You're the only man of the lot."

Rag leaped up, threatening the paralytic.

"Shet up; shet up, or I'll stick you in the fire and burn yuh to death like yuh oughta bin burned years ago."

He turned, passionately protesting, to the others.

"You're all thinkin' of yer own skins; I'm thinkin' of Stevey. I kin stand goin' up; I'm a tough old crab. But it ull break his heart jest as it's breakin' mine to think of him goin'. Why, I'd serve ten years for every one he'll have to do. You keep your tongue for them as needs it, you kike!" he finished, turning suddenly to Morganstein. "And——"

He observed that the Jew's eyes swiveled away from him and that his ears twitched. Some one in the street had touched the bell button, and the echoes of the tinkling buzz came up to them through the dark and silent hallways.

"The coppers," moaned George Le Fay, and covered his eyes.

"We've got a light in the room—damn the luck!" said Morganstein. "We might uve known they'd come here direct! We are a pack of fools, Axtell, and we deserve to pay for our folly."

The bell again reminded them of the presence of would-be visitors outside.

"No use tryin' to make a getaway," said Rag. "Not with a blindin' snowstorm and the ground thick with it. They've probably sent a 'rap' to all the ferries and tunnel stations, anyhow."

"If we're done," sighed Hilary, straightening up, and feeling for his cigarette case, "why, then, dear old chaps, we may as well 'swank.' Rag, you're in very proper livery, old chap. Let's go through it with a bit of side. Will you answer the bally bell?"

"No, no!" screamed George Le Fay. "No, no! Give me a chance to get away first—give me a chance! I've got a wife and kids. I know a place where we can hide. We'll fight the coppers, but don't let them take us to jail—no, no, no!"

He drew a long .38 from the side pocket of his heavy overcoat. Morganstein stepped behind him, locked his arm, and plucked the weapon from nerveless fingers.

"We've got jest one chance," said the Jew, unloading the revolver, "and we ain't goin 'to have *you* crab it. The bunch of us oughta be able to swear Trompey into Matteawan if we stand pat; but if we start tryin' to unload hardware and seein' coppers through the smoke, we're gone."

He opened a drawer in the table and threw the weapon into it; then, pushing Le Fay back into his chair for the second time, regarded him with dangerous eyes.

"You try to make any gitaways, and I'll drop you where you stand," he said.

Le Fay shrank back, huddling himself into Trompey's chair as seemingly infirm as the old man had been.

The bell had continued to ring by fits and starts. Morganstein nodded to Rag, who, drawing a deep breath, fastened the single button of his black morning coat, opened the door, and left the room.

The echo of his every step down the uncarpeted stairs seemed to consume moments to the breathless men above. His journey was interminable; even after they heard the door open, and seemed—so wrapt were they in his movements—to feel the rush of drifting snow and cold air on their own faces, a long time appeared to pass before they distinguished a woman's voice.

They had not recovered from their bewilderment before the hallways were ablaze with light; for Rag had snapped on the switch below. Then they heard him talking eagerly.

The fears of months were crowded into the period of waiting, their liberty was at stake; but in actual duration less than five minutes had elapsed since Rag's journey downstairs before he bounded back jubilantly, taking two steps at a time, and burst into the room, slamming the door behind him.

"It's Miss Duress!" he shouted, running his words together, so much had he to say and so eager was he to say it in the shortest possible time. "I've put her in the front parlor and lighted the fire there. She's waiting for Steve. She went to his apartment, but he wasn't there; so she came here because the clerk at Canary's give this as the address of his uncle—you, Hilary!"

They wanted to ask him so many questions that they could not decide which to ask first; consequently he continued, uninterrupted:

"Steve's *free;* they ain't goin' to do anythin' to him. Ain't that *great!* Ain't it; ain't it?"

"He's free?" echoed Morganstein. "Then Van Tromp didn't——"

"What about us? We ain't goin' to be th' fall guys fer Steve," shouted Le Fay. "If we've got to do time, so has he!"

"Oh, shet up! Nobody ain't goin' to do no time, sucker! This Miss Duress she wanted some papers outa Janissary's safe, and she musta told Steve so this afternoon, though she didn't see how she had a dog's chance a-gittin' them. Some kind of a franchise steal was on, and the reformers needed them papers to keep the mayor from signing some bill. Well, Van Tromp done as we expected. He turned Stevey up while Steve was workin' on the pete, and the dicks rushed in; but Steve dropped one of them and pushed the others aside and walked down the steps cool's you please.

"Well, this Miss Duress was a guest at that there blow-out as Janissary was givin', and when she hears them yellin' burglar and sees Steve a-comin' down the stairs, she thinks he kicked in th' front fer her sake. So, when he slipped her these docymints he copped and tells her to make a gitaway with them, she runs to the alderman what's fightin' this here franchise bill and comes back to Janissary's joint with him afore the dicks can take Steve down to the office.

"Janissary meanwhile gits told by old Trompey that Stevey's his son, and he jest sits in a daze and don't seem to see nor hear nothin'; and the butler leads him off to his room. But when Miss Duress come tearin' back in her motor with the alderman, she jest runs right up to O'Shea, the president of the street railways and the mayor himself—both of which was present at this here dinner—and she takes them aside, and she and the alderman talk to them.

"She says as how Steve wasn't tuh blame fer makin' the touch 'cause she'd conned him into it—not knowin' of course that he'd take sich a desprit chance. But now that he *had* done it and they had the statements he'd nailed—which proved the franchise was a steal or somethin'—they'd publish the whole story in the papers less'n they let Steve 'take a walk' and let that be the blow-off.

"Well, it must 'a' thrown a scare into them, all right; fer O'Shea calls the

dick over—they was only one dick; the others was harness bulls—and mitts him five century notes and says:

" 'Kneebreeks, ferget all about this or you to the goats!'

"And he also slips the two harness bulls a century apiece and tells them the same. Then Mr. Janissary's old sekkertary goes up and looks in the safe and finds the carved jewels ain't bin stole at all; so they's nothin' to it but tuh turn Stevey loose. So Stevey takes a quiet sneak while this here Miss Duress is a-talkin' to the mayor about not signing the franchise. And he ain't at Canary's; and she's come down here tuh find him, for she's scared he might do somethin' desprit 'count of the disgrace of bein' caught with the goods. See?"

"What! He didn't get the stuff?" asked George Le Fay in angry tones. "After me takin' all that trouble to get soundings, he jest uses them to cop some measly papers for a dame? Well, I'll be——"

"Oh, shet up, or I'll crown you with a cuspidor," retorted Rag indignantly. "You ain't got no more gratitude than a ground hog."

"What about that old imbecile, Van Tromp?" asked Axtell viciously. "Did Janissary knock him down and tread on him? He's a big man! You'd think he'd kill the old fool? Did he?"

Rag sighed and looked at the gathering resignedly.

"Well, you're a fine lot of gentlemen!" he said. "No thanks for the little lady savin' the bunch of you from the hoose gow; not a peep of gladness for Stevey gittin' off clean; nothin' but selfishness! I wasn't botherin' about Trompey nor nobody but Steve. If you wanta know anythin' else, I'll ask the young lady tuh come up. But, mind!—nix on the rough stuff. You keep your face closed, George, and you too, Morgy. Let Axtell and Hilary do the talkin'. I ain't gunna have her think Stevey's tied up with a bunch of lobby-gows. With me it's dif'runt. I'm jes' a servant to her, fer she's a reg'lar lady as classy as they make um, and she ain't got no idea that Steve ever stole a dollar. That's what makes this safe breakin' so strong with her; she thinks the whole thing was framed up for her benefit."

"Well, so it was," growled George Le Fay. "And what's more, he made me take chances, too. It ain't fair; I've got no interest in the dame!"

"You call her a 'dame' again, and I'll hang one on you right from my heel, un'stand?" returned Rag threateningly, and turned to the others:

"If you wanta ask her any questions, you'd better promise to behave, 'cause otherwise I ain't goin' to bring her—not an inch!"

"I ain't gunna talk," promised Morganstein, "and if George does *I'll* hang one on him before *you* do, after she goes. Bring her up, Rag!"

" 'Janissary and Duress!' " sneered Axtell from the fireplace as Rag went out. "I've heard Big Steve intended the young ones to be spliced up when they came of age—— Well," he added, with a horrible semblance of mirth, "it looks like he's got his wish. His own son steals from him, and his partner's daughter helps him——

"How do you do, my dear Miss Duress," he said, his tone again changing to one that those about him had not heard for years—courtly, deferential; the one that he had been taught, somewhere in the distant past, was proper to use to women who commanded respect. "I trust that you will pardon my not rising—unfortunately I am a cripple, Miss Duress; I haven't left my chair for fifteen years."

"Oh, I *am* sorry," said Decima impulsively, coming across the room and taking his palsied hand. "Mr. Adams never told me his uncle was—was——"

"If you will allow me," said Hilary, smiling, as he touched the sleeves of her coat, indicating that he would help her remove it. "I am Stephen's uncle—Mr. Quackenbos. This," he said, presenting the man by the fire, "is my friend and partner, Mr. Axtell. Sit here, if you please, Miss Duress. No doubt Stephen will be here presently. He always comes to his old uncle when he's in trouble."

He had placed for her Van Tromp's chair, from which he had previously ejected the injured George, who now stood glowering from the shadows at the back of the room on the girl whom, he considered, had cheated him out of his rightful due. She still wore the gown of yellow satin pailletted with silver and cut in the fashion of medieval times, which her dark beauty carried royally. Hilary, distinguished in appearance, with hair slightly grayed, and wearing a dinner jacket from Bond Street, seemed a fitting concomitant. He placed her coat and muff of sables on a divan near the door, and drew up a chair between her and Axtell.

"I have one or two questions I should like to ask you, Miss Duress," said Axtell, before Hilary sat down.

"Yes, and I have one or two I should like to ask you and Stephen's uncle, too," she replied. "I'll ask mine first if you don't mind! That horrible old man said that Stephen was Mr. Janissary's son. And Mr. Janissary *did* have a son stolen from him a long time ago. But Stephen isn't that son, is he? Because, if he is, how can you be his uncle?"

"I'm not really his uncle, dear lady," returned Hilary, a pathetic note creeping into his voice. "I was a lonely man and I adopted Stephen. He attracted me when I used to go to the corner grocery; the old grocer said he was his son, but he allowed me to have him for a certain consideration. After that the grocer failed, and since then he has been living here with us—a poor, half-witted fellow named Van Tromp."

"That was the man—that was the one that Mr. Eliason took away to question after Mr. Janissary was helped up to his bedroom. So then there is a chance that Stephen might be Mr. Janissary's son?"

"I know nothing except that this Van Tromp said Stephen was *his* son. I naturally didn't want Stephen to know his father as a drunken, infirm, crack-brained fellow, so I told him his father was an English officer who died in India. If Van Tromp stole him from Mr. Janissary—why, *he* should know! Where is he?"

"Stephen? Oh, I don't know," she answered, her tone agitated. "Here I've been sitting, forgetting that he may be doing something desperate because I led him into that—that—burglary. Oh, believe me, sir," she said, turning to Hilary, "if I'd had the slightest idea that he would do anything so rash as that I would never have mentioned those statements in Mr. Janissary's safe. Of course it was glorious for him to do it, and now the franchise won't be signed—the mayor has promised that! But it is too terrible to think that a person like Stephen that everybody respects and loves and that people call 'Stephen, the Magnificent,' should lay himself open to trial as a thief. Not that I mean he was; no, no, don't think that! I'm only giving you the world's opinion. But, after all, we care what the *meanest* people think of us, don't we? It's because they are so mean that we resent their bad opinions—to think we should give *them* a chance to despise us! Can you ever forgive me for putting Stephen in such a terrible position, Mr. Quackenbos?"

Hilary was about to answer, but a tap on the shoulder from Rag, the action coupled with a warning finger laid against the lip, kept him in silence, during which he heard a slow step on the stair—the step of one who drags himself onward with no particular purpose in view save movement.

The step well fitted the look of the man who entered. Stephen's eyes lacked luster, his shoulders seemed incapable—broad as they were—of bearing even the light coat that had sat so lightly upon them but a few hours ago. His hat was pulled far down over his face as though he feared to meet the gaze of his fellow men. As he sank into the nearest chair, they noted that his hands were red and blue with cold, for he had forgotten to put on his gloves.

He did not see that Decima was among them, for the high back of the grandfather's chair hid her from sight. Rag approached him solicitously, but said nothing, only taking Stephen's cold hands between his warm ones.

Somehow no one seemed inclined to speak. It silences even the most cynical to see one utterly crushed in spirit. Stephen had been light-hearted enough when there was danger to face; but now, knowing that the end had come between him and Decima, all the joy seemed gone out of life forever.

Young as he was, he had few illusions concerning women. His companions had dinned into him from early childhood their lack of brains, of honor, of heart; their near kinship to the animal that is withheld from its desires by none of the man-made virtues. He knew, therefore, that he had won for his own one beyond price—a woman in a million; one to whom was given all the things that most of her sex lacked; and who would go to her death with a smile on her lips for his sake.

And, because he knew her worthy of a great love and gave that love to her, so must he give her up. Into her life must come no coarsening incident, no association with one whom the world would brand with the scarlet, and, branding, sear her also. She must not even be stained by friendship with such as Stephen Adams.

So he had tramped the streets while the snow froze beneath him, hardly knowing he fought his way through a storm; indeed, lacking knowledge even of the paths he took, until by the instinct that brings a dog to its kennel or a bird to its nest, he had found himself mechanically fitting a key into the lock of the home of his childhood, and ascending the stairs to the fire before which, as a boy, he had sat, to puzzle and dream over the injustice of a world toward those who sought to save it.

The glow that came with the pressure of O'Brien's hands against his brought him out of his black broodings. His eyes were wistful as those of a child as he looked down at the man who knelt at his feet. The pressure of the hands was his this time, and tears started from the corners of his eyes, the tears that come from others' kindness when one is sad.

"You were right, Ragsey," he said. "I shouldn't have gone to-night. No, no, I didn't mean that! I'm glad I went, Ragsey; but one can't always be unselfish even if one does try. And I do try, don't I, Rag?"

"Try, try!" returned the other in a thick voice which he strove to make fierce to disguise his emotion. "Try? Naw, you don't *try*, Steve! You never thought of yerself in yer life. If yuh had, yuh mighta bin somethin' insteada jest Dutchin' yer book fer a lot of no-good ungrateful rats that don't care whether yuh live or die s'long's they get *their'n*. But yuh ain't a-goin' tuh do it no more, Steve. No, *sir!* Miss Duress! Talk tuh him, won't yuh?"

Looking up for the first time, Stephen realized that all the members of "the company" were present, and that Decima was advancing toward him from the fire. He leaped to his feet, dazed, and, catching her hands, bent his head over them.

"Oh, Stephen—not there; not there," she said, her head bent, too. "Stephen—'Stephen, the Magnificent!' Oh, Stephen, I love you, I love you—*my* Stephen—*mine*."

Her arms stole about his neck. Hilary turned his back. Rag, Morganstein—even George Le Fay, sensible of the delicacy of the situation, realizing what it meant for this gently bred girl to forget the presence of others, affected to be interested elsewhere. Only old Axtell sat, smiling in sinister fashion, cruelly cynical; for there are some men without hearts to be touched, and who, if there be a hereafter, die with the death of their bodies—and Axtell was such a one!

"Stephen, Stephen! You are wonderful! I couldn't have believed there was such a man on earth, much less think he would ever be *mine*. Stephen, to-night when I thought you might do something to yourself, I nearly died. And now I've got you, I want to watch over you all the time. Stephen, I want you; I want you! Must we wait any longer, my dearest?"

He disengaged her hands and sat down again, his fingers strained as they locked about his forehead.

"Decima—don't; don't, dear! Your

man is a dream man, not *me!* You must know; you should know!"

He looked up, steadying his gaze with an effort.

"Decima, I'm a thief! I didn't go to Janissary's house just to get those statements, as you think. I had planned to steal his jewels before you told me about the statements. I've been stealing for eight years. The Willette, Vaughan, Gerstein, Mendum robberies —every one was mine! I'm just a common thief!"

"It's a damn' lie, Steve!" Rag strode between Stephen and Decima. "A common thief don't send boys to college and 'prentice them to trades! He don't pay poor people's hospital bills and give money to fo'ndlin' schools and set'l'm'nt houses. Did yuh ever hear of one of them givin' a thousand people a Thanksgivin' dinner, or havin' a Chris'mus party fer the servants' kids in his hotel? Don't let him hand you no talk like that, Miss Duress. I suppose you gotta know he's broke into houses and took money and sparklers —wouldn't be square for him notta tell you—but every time he took a dime we had tuh hold up our right arms and swear the guy he was gunna nick had stole from the poor. Common thief, hey? Common thief? Well, if you're a common thief, Steve, then I pray tuh God there wouldn't be nuthin' but thieves in the world!"

Decima covered her eyes. The troubled tones of Hilary supplemented O'Brien's fiery peroration.

"O'Brien is crude, very crude, my dear young lady, very crude; but, in a way, he's right; yes, he's right. You see, we—well, we, to an extent, have taken the law into our own hands. Purely philanthropic, however, my dear young lady, purely philanthropic, I assure you——"

Axtell scowled him into silence, his eyes gleaming with evil; but, when he spoke, it was in honeyed tones.

"We were given brains not to cheat our fellow men, Miss Duress, but to teach them *not* to cheat. We were given strength to protect the weak, not to oppress them. To-day the strong in mind and body own just one law—the law of the conqueror. We fight them by their own rules. They steal with protection, and we steal without it. That is the only difference."

Decima lifted a tear-stained face.

"So you—you didn't—do it—for me —after all?" she said, between sobs.

"Only partly," Stephen answered, his voice dull.

"You—you—*break* into houses—like a *burglar?*"

"Don't—don't talk about it any more, Decima. It hurts!"

"Oh, I understand," she cried impulsively, catching his hand again. "I understand, and I honor you for it, Stephen. But you mustn't do it any more—no, not any more, will you? I have some money. You can have it—*all*—nearly a million dollars. You can do anything you like with it. Only don't—don't—you know! Promise me you won't, dear!"

Axtell held himself hard against the back of his chair. His hope of future wealth was slipping away from him as a new something dawned in Stephen's eyes. He spoke coldly.

"Stephen has given almost half of what you have already. If he quits the fight now, it means he goes back on all the principles he says he believes in. It means he is a coward! But he won't be! I know Stephen better than that! Don't I, my boy?"

He had played on this chord ever since the boy had been old enough to reason. It was as effective as ever. With a groan, Stephen loosened Decima's grasp, and turned away.

Rag, in a frenzy of rage, shook his clenched hand in Axtell's face.

"Shet up; shet up!" he yelled. "You've had enough from Steve—Steve, old pal," he entreated, a hand on the younger man's shoulder; "take her money. Go into bis'ness. You'll make plenty tuh give the poor. Don't pay no attention to what Axtell says!"

"How could he make money?" countered Axtell coldly. "Go into Wall Street, maybe, and put up the price of poor people's food and clothes? Or help wreck their banks and railroads?

Or corner necessities like salt and flour? Why, even the money that Miss Duress would give him came out of the pockets of a thousand small grocers that Janissary and Duress ruined. But I suppose there's no use talking; so, go on! Be a quitter, Stephen, do! Yes, by all means! Do!"

They saw that Stephen's back, which was turned to them, was trembling convulsively; his fingers clenched and unclenched; his arms twitched.

Now he turned, his face expressionless, addressing Axtell.

"I don't know how much on the level you are with that talk, Mr. Axtell," he said. "I try to believe that you're unselfish; that you're persuading me against my happiness because you really believe what you say is true. But, somehow, ever since I've been a child, I've had a suspicion that it's your hatred for humanity, not your love, that prompted you to teach me the principles you have. If you were rich—if luck had made you one of the men you urge me to go on fighting—I doubt if the people would receive much from you!"

He held up his hand as Axtell would have interrupted him.

"Don't say anything more about being a quitter! I won't stand it! For, whether you believe in what you've taught me or not, *I know it's true.* I couldn't go on, knowing all the misery that's in the world, and calmly permitting it when I have the power to fight. I must have money to do big things, and the only way I can get enough is to steal it. So you're right."

He turned to Decima, his fevered hands closing over hers.

"I've been hoping against hope. He's opened my eyes. I'll try to keep them open hereafter. Do you understand?"

She gasped unbelievingly at him. He had spoken—she knew vaguely that he was speaking now—but his words carried no meaning, only a certain numbness. His eyes told her the story that she could not understand, for in them was the light of self-sacrifice.

"You don't mean you'll go on as you've been going—you don't mean that; you can't!"

"How can I help it? There are so few of us willing to fight against the debauchers of everything that is good. Some one must! Can't you see how things are to-day? Children are taught that to lie, to steal, and to cheat is to be great! The good men get poorer every day. They are handicapped with honesty. The thieves get richer and richer. If it goes on this way, we'll end a race of slaves! Slaves! Slaves, tagged with a number. Slaves who work, not for their own happiness, but just because their masters *will* that they shall. Why, to-day it is pardonable to be anything except poor! If this canker-worm goes on spreading, all our men will be without honor, all our women without virtue. I'm not doing much, it's true. But I'm fighting the 'Machine.' Fighting and gaining strength. Some day I'll find the way to conquer!"

"And you'll give me up, Stephen, just to conquer?"

"What else can I do, Decima? I can't ask you to share a life like mine. To the world I'll be just what I called myself, a common thief! If I should explain my motives, a cry of 'anarchy' would go up, and the poor lambs that are being gobbled up would huddle closer to the wolf—for protection against me! The world is like that, Dessie. It'll go on stoning its prophets, and jailing its champions until the end of time. Decima, you mustn't, you mustn't try to change me. It can't be any different from what I say. You'll have to go!"

He caught her hands and kissed them, holding them tightly pressed against his lips.

"Oh, my dear, my dear; there will never be any happiness for me again."

"I won't go!" she cried, in her agony. "I won't; I won't! The worst of life is the best for me, if it's with you. I won't be spared. I'm not sweet; I'm not good; I'm not anything except a girl that loves you, and I won't be given up, Stephen, I won't!"

But he had turned away from her, and motioned to Hilary, who caught up her coat, and draped it about her as one might drape a statue. She neither

moved nor spoke. Gently he guided her to the door. But, as he would have urged her out, she turned her face—white, dumbly, piteously entreating—to Stephen. He staggered, a great sob wrung out of him, staggered, and fell.

Axtell permitted himself the luxury of a sneer.

PART TEN.

THE HEAD OF THE HOUSE DEPARTS FROM IT

Since Van Tromp had spoken, Stephen Janissary had said no word. The man who had ruled millions had suffered himself to be led away like a child is led by its nurse. Solicitations, entreaties, requests for information as to his desires and wishes, had all fallen on deaf ears. The old man—for now it had become apparent that Stephen Janissary was very old—sat staring with eyes that saw but one thing, the shoe of a little child; with ears that heard only the words that his enemy had spoken; sat and stared, and was silent.

Many times they came to him—Eliason; the butler; Timothy; Vaughan and O'Shea had tried to tell him something—something about statements, or papers, or whether or not the mayor would sign some franchise on the following morning. It had been words to Stephen Janissary, nothing more.

At last they left him in peace, and the great house was still. He was glad of that. These people with their buzzing about papers and money and policemen and mayors were very tiresome. They did not understand that Stephen Janissary had other things of which to think—the shoes of little children, and old grocers in antiquated garments, and sons who were thieves.

Outside, the wind hurled frozen flakes against the window. Within, the fire died slowly for want of fuel; the room grew cold. But the old man did not know.

There were things to remember—for instance, the night the street before the house had been strewn with tanbark, and he had stood in the stately dining room below; no longer dreaming in teas, sugars, and spices, but in world conquests for his son—his son, Stephen Janissary, Junior, who would marry the daughter of that old aristocrat, Ben Duress, and rule the world of business in the days to come.

He had begun to build, not for himself, but for that tiny bit of humanity that lay in its swan's-down coverings just across the hall from the room in which he now stood. The business his father left him had been good enough for Stephen Janissary; but the boy must have more, more; for he would be a gentleman, and the husband of a Duress.

Those two years that had passed, then; they were the only happy ones of his life. He had amalgamated with Duress, and added shop after shop to his chain; coming home each night in fresh triumph to rush upstairs to where the child lay, and take him tenderly into his hairy hands—something too delicate and fragile for one like him to hold at all.

He had begun for the boy's sake; and what he had begun he could not stop; no, not even when his heart had been wrung with agony, and he had sought to spend all his millions to recover that most precious of his possessions.

Struck down in the dark, and by such a one as that ghost that had come to his feast to-night; struck down, struck down!

He wondered, dully, if men would have called upon his name with hatred if the boy had not been taken from him? At all events, he would have had one that would have loved him better than life itself; one for whom he would have gladly died.

Those days in Washington Square, when he had sat with old Ben Duress, their children side by side; those nights when he had sent the nurse away, and had sat beside the child's cradle, rocking it with his foot, and humming to it

scraps of street songs and old Methodist hymns that he remembered from boyhood——

The years between that time and the present seemed to blur to him. Then, suddenly, he recalled that all men hated him!

Was there one who ever basked in the warmth of his smile for anything except gain? Was there a single one who sought his companionship for any reason save business association and advancement? His lieutenants, his secretaries, his employees—they all froze when he came near them, and he had once jubilated in the fact, though they hated him, they were yet only his bond servants and slaves, over whose lives he held absolute suzerainty; who grew glad when he approved, who chilled to the bone when he frowned.

The people, too, might hate, but how they feared him! The politicians who came humbly soliciting his aid, his associates in business who listened meekly while he laid down the law, his clerks, his servants—never had one of them revolted, for they were afraid, and fawned upon him, sycophants all!

To-morrow morning they would read in those hateful prints that his son was a thief!

Stephen Janissary's son a thief; handled by policemen, taken to the common jail, insulted by all! Stephen Janissary's flesh and blood; the one creature in all the world that he had loved, that was absolutely his own.

They would profess sorrow—those fools! But in their hearts they would be glad. Though he would not see it, they would smile and nudge each the other when he passed. Those whom he despised and ruled would be laughing at him; the whole world would be laughing at him—maybe pitying him!

It came upon him in that instant that he had failed—failed absolutely. All his life he had known nothing save figures, figures, figures. He had had no childhood, no happiness! One wife had feared, the other hated him! He had never learned to find beauty in the things in which even the humblest found their pleasure.

When Stephen was born, he might have retired, a man of comfortable income with no need to work again all his life. What did he want with more money? His tastes had ever been simple; his requirements few. What he had spent in ostentation had been only on the advice of others. No! He had made this fortune for the boy; piled up millions until they were uncountable, and spent little or nothing. It had been for the boy, and now that boy was a thief!

"No man has ever bested me; no man ever kept me from what I wanted; and no man ever shall."

Was it only yesterday that he had said that, or was it years ago? How had he dared defy Something so far beyond, so vast, so terrible; Something that had chosen for the instrument of its vengeance the meanest of Stephen Janissary's victims?

Beaten by an old fool, a small tradesman whom he had trodden down on his way to rulership, one so small that he had not even a recollection of his face or his name! Beaten by an old fool, who, while Janissary had thought himself ruler of the people, had crouched in some foul hole, leering and grinning, and only waiting for the time to come when his enemy would reach the zenith of his career to humble him utterly before all those bond servants and slaves whom he despised.

Beaten by an old fool!

Pictures came to him—horrible pictures! Pictures of a little child subjected to shameful tortures because he was Stephen Janissary's son. Pictures of that child being told of his own father as a devil in human form, one to be loathed and hated, his smallest actions interpreted into fiendish deeds. He remembered the night on the *Mauradriatic* when young Stephen's bitter words had burned into his brain:

"The stolen money of poor shopkeepers who are in the morgue because you've ruined them—the blood money of laborers who sweat twelve hours a day for you—the virtue-wrung money of their daughters whom you've driven to the streets. Tainted money, you thief;

money with the curse of death on every dollar; and it is going to charity—yes, Mr. Janissary, it *is!*"

"You thief!"

So his son thought him a thief; his own son, who had cheated him—a common card sharp—called him a thief, and gave his money to charity; the money that he had piled up for that very son!

Oh, how they would laugh and jibe and sneer to-morrow! Stephen Janissary the father of a thief, Stephen Janissary beaten by an old fool, Stephen Janissary disowned by his own flesh and blood, who, even if he were both card cheat and burglar, thought himself better than his father!

Laugh, laugh, laugh!

He struggled to his feet. The last coal had burned itself out, it seemed. They would laugh, eh? Laugh at Stephen Janissary! Well, he would cheat them of that, anyhow! He had ruled them once. Let them always remember him as Stephen Janissary, the ruler, the Warwick, the kingmaker, who had made the public his bond servants and his slaves.

Laugh at him, would they? They'd not laugh! He'd see to that! They should respect him, even in memory; for he was their ruler, and game to the end. If he might not rule, then it was time that he should go.

But laugh! They should never do that!

He groped across the room to his night table. In the drawer of it had always been a protection against possible slaves, who, losing their reason, might come to him in their maniacal fury. How cool and relieving the cold metal of it was against his hot, crackling skin——

No, they would never laugh! With faults and sins that were greater than other men, still a *man* for all that, and one who despised them even when his departure was at hand——

He had been wrong about the fire. A great streamer shot up all unawares, and showed that the white of the snow against the windowpanes was as nothing to the white of Stephen Janissary's face, along which was slowly creeping some dark, snakelike thing that seemed to grow as it came.

PART ELEVEN.

"TO THOSE FROM WHENCE IT CAME"

CHAPTER I.

CANBY KERNAHAN INTERVIEWS ELIASON.

Since it had become his misfortune to be attached to the afternoon edition of his paper—his splendid work on the Graham-McKenna case having terminated his connection with the Sunday sheet—Canby Kernahan knew he must heed the none too dulcet tones of an alarm clock when that useful article announced that the hour of seven was at hand. Bath, breakfast, and subway journey all must be accomplished before the hour of eight; for that was the time he was expected to report to that (officially) stern tyrant, his city editor.

On this particular morning, Canby found him in a state of great mental perturbation, pacing up and down the room, and shouting terrifying orders to "cub" reporters, who always arrived at least a quarter hour before their time. Canby was the first dependable member of the staff to appear, and the city editor might have fallen on his neck for sheer joy, had he been French or lived in another age. As it was, he only said:

"You're actually here at last, are you? Well, listen: The mayor has sent out word he won't sign the franchise. That's good for a three-column head on the front page——"

"Good for a full-page head, you mean," returned Canby jubilantly. "War type, too. Didn't we do it all ourselves? Isn't it *our* work? Three-column head nothing! Six-column spread is what you mean?"

"Oh, do I? Do I? Then what am I going to do with the story of Stephen Janissary's suicide? Since you're so wise, maybe you'll tell me that?"

"*Whose*—suicide?"

The reporter dropped both the cigarette and lighted match he had been holding.

"Here! Stamp out that flame before it sets fire to that copy paper. Got anything against this sheet? Stephen Janissary's suicide, I said. Big Steve Janissary's, that's whose, and——"

"Are you sure it was suicide?"

"No; I'm not sure I'm living! But he did it with his own revolver, in his own room, with his door locked from the inside, and he had the gun clutched in his hand when they found him."

"Who reported it?"

"City News! So I'll have to put Douglas Thomas on the franchise case, and send you up to Janissary's."

"But the franchise case is *mine!*" complained Canby.

"Oh, fathead! Don't you see I'm giving you the star assignment? The franchise story is all right, but this death of Janissary's—and suicide at that—is worth two or three pages to the paper. Here, Young!"

He hailed another member of the staff who had just entered, and who, conscious that he should have been there a few moments before to be strictly impeccable, came forward on the run.

"Go with Kernahan, Young. And you'll want a couple of cubs, too, to run errands, I guess. Hey, you kids over there! Demarest! Huntley! The others of you sit still. Come here! Go with Mr. Kernahan! Now get out, Canby! Here's the flimsy from the City News. Take a taxicab; take a couple of taxicabs; only get there in time to give us a page, at least, for our second edition; we'll fill the first up with rewrites. Go to it, boys!"

The taxicab requisitioned just off Park Row, it was only a matter of moments before they passed through the snow-wreathed arch that is the gateway to Washington Square. A block from the Janissary house, the vehicle's further progress was impeded by a mounted policeman, who raised a white-gloved hand.

"Go round to Sixth Av'noo and come back," he directed. "Yuh can't come thisaway."

Canby craned his neck from the window, and noted that Fifth Avenue for two blocks seemed more like Brooklyn Bridge terminal after the close of business. Even the mounted policemen—of whom there were many—seemed to find some difficulty in forcing their horses through the press. On the nearest side street, motor vehicles, broughams, and landaus were parked on both sides as if for a racing meet or a Vanderbilt Cup race.

"Here, chauffeur!" Canby directed, "we'll drop you here. Take your fare. Come along, boys."

They left the machine, and began their efforts to reach the Janissary house. Another policeman, this one on foot and wielding his night stick with fine carelessness for the heads of the crowd, attempted to push them back; but Canby showed his police card, and, to avoid any more attempted detainments of the sort, placed that useful bit of blue-and-orange printing in the band of his derby hat.

Half of those through whom he fought his way were ignorant of the cause that had brought so many people together; and eagerly inquired of Canby—or any others who seemed to be steering a definite course—what was the occasion; was the President in town? Was it a holiday they had overlooked, and might they expect a parade?

The other half knew of Janissary's death by his own hand, and they were split into rival factions; three-quarters of them expressing the conventional sorrow that comes so cheaply and readily to commonplace people when the demise of any one is announced; the other quarter seemingly of the opinion that the suicide story was a myth, and that some one had killed the Master of Amalgamated.

"Hope they don't catch him!"

"The cops have got 'im now—in that there house. They're a-waitin' till we

go away so's they kin take 'im to th' Tombs!"

"Let's rescue' im, then, shall we?"

"Sure; let's get nearer th' house. Come on!"

Canby lost his hat before he was halfway to the house, nor did he try to retrieve anything but the police card; for the hat was trampled hopelessly out of shape the moment it struck the ground, and his fingers came near sharing its fate when he reached for the bit of pasteboard.

The mad mob spirit now took upon his gentle soul, and he pushed, kicked, nudged, elbowed, struck, and otherwise disgracefully comported himself in his efforts to attain his goal; which he did finally at the expense of his feet, which were cruelly trodden upon, and his necktie, which he lost utterly.

He was therefore in no mood to receive graciously the announcement of one of the many policemen who kept the crowds back from the gate to Janissary's garden that he could not enter; but, showing his police card with one hand, and tearing back coat, vest, and overcoat with the other, disclosed his fire badge fastened to his braces; and, then, without further ado, entered the garden, alone, for his followers had evidently not shared his luck.

The coroner had been and gone, a lieutenant of police, inside, assured him; no, there wasn't any doubt about the suicide; Mr. Janissary had killed himself, but why, no one could say. The embalmers had taken charge of the body—or it was to be cremated, he believed, though wasn't sure—and nobody could see it. No good to see it, anyhow, after the coroner's verdict had been passed, was there?

Had had a party the night before and had killed himself after all the guests were gone. About three o'clock, Mr. Eli-son—or some such person; Mr. Janissary's secretary he was—had heard a shot, and tried to get into the room. It was locked; so, being an old man, he had to get the butler and the other servants out of bed, and, after all of them had yelled for Mr. Janissary at the top of their lungs and hadn't got any answer, they had broken down the door, and found their master lying with his feet toward the door and his head on the hearth.

Had his own revolver in his hand; one of those long, nickel-barreled thirty-eights, with a mother-of-pearl, inlaid handle—yes, he, the lieutenant, had seen it—and it had Mr. Janissary's monogram on it; this Mr. Eli-son remembered having bought it at Griffony's several years before. Wasn't any doubt about the suicide; although, to make sure, he and some other central office men had examined the windows and the ground beneath them to see if there were any finger or rope marks on the sills, or any footprints below—any of which would be very easy to find with so much snow about, especially as the weather bureau reports said the snow had stopped falling at two o'clock; so they couldn't be hidden—didn't he see?

And that was all he knew about it, and he'd told it so many times his throat was getting dry, and if he, Canby, or any of the other newspaper boys wanted a drink, all they had to do was to come down to the dining room.

This Mr. Eli-son? He couldn't just say, but he thought he was in that room at the head of the stairs.

Canby, exchanging curt greeting with other pressmen who thronged about the men from the central office jotting down notes on folded copy paper, made his way up the back stairway, and, without knocking, opened the door to the library, where sat O'Shea, Vaughan, Rollins K. Hilman, Philip Helmet, Arbuthnot, and more of last night's dinner guests, along with other closely associated with the affairs of Amalgamated, and the various businesses of which the dead man had been the controlling factor.

They did not note Canby's addition to their number, so absorbed were they in some matter which was receiving their closest, if somewhat excited and apprehensive, attention.

"We've *got* to smother it up, I tell you. The market ull all go to smash as it is."

"After what the fellow did last night,

what chance will any of us have when he's the head of Amalgamated? As O'Shea says, Eliason, we've got to smother it up. Buy the young man off; tell him he can't prove his claim, and that we'll fight him through the courts every step of the way."

"You haven't got any proof, anyhow, except the word of a crazy, old fool."

"What's the matter with buying the *old fool* off?"

Canby sank down into a chair at the back of the room. There were at least twenty men present, sitting and standing, but their eyes had not wandered his way, as yet; so intently were they focused on Eliason, who, with one hand held, trumpet fashion to his good ear, listened to the various heated speeches above recorded; and answered, with due deliveration:

"It is a thing to ask, gentlemen. Mr. Janissary's own son! I can't do it. Besides, this man Van Tromp swears to go to the newspapers with the whole story. He seems to care for the boy, somehow; watched him grow up, you know. Hated the father, but loved the boy; wants to make reparation. You understand my position, gentlemen!"

"You actually mean, then, that you're going to send for this son, and tell him that everything that was Janissary's belongs to him?"

Philip Helmet spoke, for the first time in his life despairingly, one hand held to his aching head. He was a sleek, prosperous gentleman about whom press and public had had considerable to say when soldiers fighting for their country in a distant land had written home concerning foul and diseased meats given them for rations. He had taken that affair lightly; but the prospect he now faced gave to his eyes a look as sickly as that of any starving soldier who had opened a can of his meat.

"A little louder, Mr. Helmet—the right side, you know! Thank you! Yes; what else can I do?"

Rollins K. Hilman, a little, hawk-nosed man, the bald spot on his crown giving him the appearance of a renegade monk, broke in fiercely with:

"Do! Do anything, but hand over a fortune like that to a mad socialist; socialist, no! Anarchist, I mean. This fellow will wreck the Street in two weeks. I won't stand it; I tell you I won't, Eliason!"

"He's right; it won't do," said Arbuthnot heavily.

"This Van Tromp won't dare confess to kidnaping. Why, he can get twenty years' imprisonment for that!" said O'Shea, his trained, legal mind seizing upon the only possible chance. "And you can tell him from us, Eliason, that we'll see he gets *life* if he dares tell that story. More; if he goes away, and shuts his mouth, we'll give him a cool hundred thousand. Put your ear closer, Eliason. Did you hear what I said?"

"I heard, Mr. O'Shea, but it's no use. Van Tromp *expects* to go to the penitentiary—rather welcomes it—martyr's crown, so to speak. Gentlemen, there's not a possible chance of averting this thing. We've got a fanatic, and a bold, dangerous, young man, to fight. The public loves this young Stephen; calls him 'Stephen, the Magnificent.'"

"Spectacular ass!" growled Fillimore, feeling nervously the knot he had carelessly tied in his hurry, and wondering if he preserved his usual well-groomed appearance.

"But this Van Tromp can't prove his story, I tell you," almost moaned Helmet, both hands now circling his forehead, for the pain of his headache had become intense.

"The *right* side, Mr. Helmet——"

"Oh, damn your ear, Eliason!" shouted O'Shea. "Helmet says this old daddy longlegs can't prove his claim—can't *prove* it! And I think he's right."

"Well, he isn't, sir, if you'll pardon me! First of all, the boy's the living picture of Mr. Janissary; second, this man Van Tromp has got all the baby clothes that the child wore when it was stolen; and, third, he's willing to go to the penitentiary to right the wrong he's done the boy. Now if he tells this story to the newspapers all the happenings of last night will come out; people will learn how this Stephen Adams got the statements that defeated the franchise,

and they'll help him fight his case until he wins it. It will be a painful family story, and a disgraceful business altogether. There may be an investigation ordered by the attorney-general. You've all seen this Stephen Adams! Does he strike you as the sort of man who'll lay down on his claims where the greatest fortune in the world is concerned?"

"A mad anarchist with a billion dollars!" groaned Rollins K. Hilman. "We can't *allow it!*"

"The right side, Mr. Hilman——"

"Can't allow it, he says," stormed O'Shea.

"We *must* allow it. If we fight young Stephen, he'll get it all the same, and, after he gets it, he may fight *us!* I've kept this Van Tromp in the house ever since he told that story last night, but now that he knows Mr. Janissary is dead, I can't hold him much longer. He says he'll go straight to the newspapers if Stephen Adams isn't here by eleven o'clock. That's his last word!"

Canby Kernahan, his face flushed, got to his feet excitedly.

"I'll go for Stephen, Mr. Eliason! I'll go for him," he chirped happily.

At the sound of the strange voice, there were no longer any in the room who sat. Synchronously, all had advanced a step with clenched hands, staring at the intruder.

"You didn't lock the door, you doddering idiot!"

O'Shea addressed Eliason, who held up a defensive palm.

"The back door is smashed; I couldn't lock it. What do you want in here, Mr. Kernahan?" he asked abjectly, turning to the reporter. "How much have you heard?"

"I've heard enough," said Canby, nodding wisely, "to advise you to send for Stephen Adams immediately. And I'll be the messenger. Oh, I shan't tell him anything; I'll leave that to you, sir. But I'll be here to see that he's told."

He turned abruptly, and left the room.

"A newspaper reporter," explained Eliason. His hand was to his head also now. "The man who came with John Graham to demand those statements from Mr. Janissary Wednesday afternoon—Kernahan's his name!"

"Kernahan!" almost screamed O'Shea. "Kernahan?—the man who dug up McKenna?"

Eliason nodded, and O'Shea sat down, the spirit utterly gone from him, crushed out by this unexpected climax to rebellious indecision. There was silence for a considerable length of time, if that fast fleeting measurement can be adjusted to the emotions that may rapidly succeed one another in the minds of men who taste for the first time the bitterness of defeat.

"You—traitor," said Fillimore suddenly. "I believe you arranged to have that reporter come in."

"The right side, Mr. Fillimore, if you please——"

The Beau Brummel of Amalgamated turned from him with clenched fists, upraised eyes, and a long-drawn breath of murderous impatience. O'Shea got to his feet again, and spoke slowly:

"Eliason's right. We'll have to acknowledge the boy, and talk some sense into his head. We'll tell the public that his father has known who he was for some years; but that, by reason of the boy differing in his opinions from him, they could never agree, and that it was the sorrow of his father over the boy's attitude in this matter that finally drove him to suicide! We can count on everybody keeping quiet who was here last night. We'll have to give those detectives some more money, and send the servants who heard the rumpus back to England. I think, if we accept this young man without a murmur and try, day by day, to impress him with our principles, we'll get him to be reasonble, and leave the business end of his father's affairs to us."

"Yes; tell him to do anything he wants with the income and the cash money—we won't object to that," cried Helmet eagerly.

"We can show him, too, how much more money we can make for him to spend in charity if he leaves it to us," chimed in Arbuthnot, his face lighting up. "Oh, yes, I think he'll listen to that, don't you, Fillimore?"

"Oh, I dunno; let me alone," returned the one addressed. "But, by the way," he added, his expression also becoming more cheerful, "what was the name of that supposed uncle of his that this Van Tromp fellow told you about—the one that took him away from Van Tromp and brought him up when he got too poor? I sort of recognized the name."

He addressed Eliason, taking care to enunciate carefully into his good ear. The secretary consulted the notebook from which he had read the various facts concerning Stephen's abduction and early life when the business associates of Janissary had first assembled in the library; and which had no errors —only the omission of any mention that the training of young Stephen had been a peculiar one; for Van Tromp, now that his vengeance was satiated, had remembered many kindly actions on the part of George, Morgy, and Hilary, and, because of them, forgave his other enemy, Axtell; so that he had given Eliason to understand that the others in the Chapel Street house had been ignorant of the facts of Stephen's birth and the home of his babyhood.

"Rather peculiar name, Mr. Fillimore; possibly I have it wrong. 'Hilary Quanbos' is what I have written here. 'Quanbos'—an odd name, isn't it?"

Fillimore was beaming, positively beaming. His tone was actually kindly as he corrected the secretary.

"It's spelt 'Quackenbos'; but you've got the pronunciation correctly. He's an Englishman, Helmet," he said, with a smile, "and as sophisticated a beggar as I ever knew! Belongs to that actors' club uptown that I run into occasionally. If *he* brought up the youngster, he'll have some influence with him, and, believe *me,* I can't see old Quackenbos chucking away any millions because they're what the muckrakers call tainted. I *know* the fellow, and he's as sharp as they make 'em. Always had my doubts of him at cards, by the way; and from what Janissary said about his son on the *Mauradriatic* looks like Quackenbos might have taught the youngster some of his tricks."

"Why, all this 'reform' business of young Stephen's may be only a 'front,' anyway," agreed O'Shea, catching some of the others' optimism. "A lot of those fellows only raise a howl and persecute us because we don't let them on the inside of the game. Guess we did all our worrying for nothing, if this Quackenbos fellow is what you say, Fillimore. Now, before young Stephen comes here, suppose you go around and give this 'uncle' of his a quiet tip. Eh?"

"Looks like good dope to me," answered the younger man, stroking his short, black mustache. "Meanwhile, I'll leave you all to soft soap the heir. But, by the way, how about that newspaper fellow who just went after him?"

"If he's a friend of the boy's, he won't talk, will he?" replied O'Shea. "But, anyhow, we'll see that he doesn't. Meanwhile, run along, Fillimore, and attend to your part of the job. I promise you we'll look after ours."

Fillimore caught up his mink-lined coat, his hat, and his stick, and went out by the front way. Eliason rang for the butler, who pushed forward the wheeled cellaret, and unlocked its compartments, sending a footman for cracked ice and charged waters. Some of those costly Havanas that Eliason loved, along with the khedive's own private stock of cigarettes, were set alight, and the dove of peace seemed, for the moment, to have settled over the members of Amalgamated.

CHAPTER II.

"TO SET THE PEOPLE FREE."

It had been early morning when Morganstein came to Chapel Street; he remembered noting how brightly the sun had shone across the snow-covered roofs and chimney pots to where the East River ran, the sailing craft on it like flowers wreathed about a shining sword; when he looked upon it from his window far up near the roof of the thin and lofty hotel that was his home. And seeing the morning sun was an experience unusual for Morgy, who usually quitted his favorite Tenderloin *cabaret* only in time to draw the curtains of his

bedroom windows before a red streamer from the east should seek to penetrate his privacy; and who—as every bell boy, chambermaid, telephone girl, and desk clerk in the place knew—was under no circumstances to be reminded that there were such things as breakfast until more conventional folk had reached black coffee after leisurely disposing of elaborate "course" luncheons.

But the particular exception had been made in favor of the insistent person from the "Spring" exchange, and the lobby loungers had been treated to the unusual sight of the generally clean-shaven and scrupulously groomed gentleman in the astrakhan-collared coat hurrying by with a day's growth of Assyrian beard, and wearing his favorite Ascot tied on the lining side.

This had gone unnoticed by the wearer until it grew too dark to figure any longer, and he had strolled over to the window, for perhaps the hundredth time, to where Axtell sat, his legs wrapped in a slumber rug, peering anxiously into the ingenious arrangement of glasses that gave the paralytic sight of all those who traversed both sides of Chapel Street, and even occasional glimpses of cometlike elevated trains whisking their green-lighted tails up Sixth Avenue.

"Ain't he even in sight—yet?" asked the Jew.

Axtell shook his head, and Morganstein, peering into the glasses, noted his sartorial indiscretion, and recrossed the room again to the mirror over the mantel, where, holding his gorgeous emerald and diamond pin in his mouth, he carefully folded over the blanketlike necktie in the approved form.

At the center table, Hilary Quackenbos and George Le Fay still figured away on pages torn from a "copy book," which the servant had purchased down the street a half hour before, the supply of house writing paper having been exhausted by the computations of the three of them, since Fillimore had left just before noon.

At that time, there had been some six sheets of foolscap, covered in Morgy's Spencerian hand, with a list of the various interests that made up the Janissary estate, opposite which, in ruled columns, were written their value, together with the various rates of interests, dividends, and the like accruing annually to them.

Now, the second-floor front seemed too small to contain the amount of sheets that were variously disposed about it; there were sheets of paper, half stacked like cards, on every table and chair. The floor was as completely covered with them as was the studio roof opposite with snow. They leaned against the Carrara marbles and the ormulu clock on the mantel. Axtell had a bundle of them in his lap; and the gray film that covered the burning sea coal in the grate testified to the fact that numbers of them had been tossed upon the flames.

And still Hilary and George continued to contribute to this plethora!

Morganstein lighted a cigarette. In the little flicker of extra light, it seemed that the two compilers of statistics took an extra spurt forward before it should expire. Morganstein, smiling indulgently, snapped on the current into the red-shaded, electric lamp. The decided change in conditions caused the two to pause, and look up.

"Confound you, old chap," said Hilary irritably; "you've spoiled a jolly bit of compound interest I was doing on K. J. and W. Preferred. Why can't you leave a fellow in peace?"

"The Oiltown City Securities ull bring us jest one hundred and seventy thousand dollars a year by themselves," stated George, with great satisfaction, wetting the point of his pencil to make a bit of fancy scrollwork under his latest subtrahend. "Guess that's going some for one little block of stock? Guess it's bad?"

"That's nothing to Petersfield Oil," returned Morganstein, with the superiority of one who has not wasted his talents for mathematics on a bagatelle. "It's good for jest three times that—a million a year from one piece of property. Boys, I tell you, I can't git it through my nut! It all sounds like th' bunk to me! I can't believe there's

that much money in the world—a million a year jest out of Petersfield. When we come to add up the total of these here incomes, we'll all about drop dead. Can't seem possible that one man's goin' to have so much money—*one man!*"

"One man's not to have it," called out Axtel peremptorily from the window. "Don't start that sort of talk, Morgy, or you'll be using it when the boy comes in. It's no more his than it's ours! Isn't this a company? Don't we share and share alike? Don't let me hear you talking like that again, you black-muzzled, cliff-dwelling kike! And don't be acting as if you weren't used to big money; or else the boy will put it all over you. We've got enough of persuading to do as it is."

"Oh, 'can' all that, Axtell," broke in Le Fay. "Steve's not goin' to try to git away from the regular agreement between the gang. He knows we'll all share on this jest as we shared on everything else! I'd like to see him try to pull any stuff about it bein' all his. I'd just——"

"You'd what?" invited Morganstein. "I suppose you'd tear right up to him and hang one on him, hey? Yes, you would! Nobody ain't fergot the rat way you acted last night, George. But when it comes to talkin', anybuddy 'u'd think you was runnin' this outfit! But, say, ain't it great; ain't it wonderful? I can't git over it! Why, say; with our brains and all that money, we'll about rule the earth. Think of me with a police record as long as a Hot Springs drug bill bossin' that Wall Street gang, lendin' money to the United States Treasury when it's broke, and givin' kings and emperors the haughty eye when they want to make a touch? I guess since the beginnin' of time, there never was such a 'deep heel' as this one, boys!"

Hilary, whose contemplation of his own reward of virtue had been so pleasing that he sat smiling silently, now looked up reprovingly.

"Incidentally I should suggest, dear old chap, that, since your social position is going to undergo such radical change, you endeavor to cure yourself of some of your eccentric forms of speech. 'Deep heel,' indeed! You positively embarrassed me while Mr. Fillimore was here! If you don't watch out, they're liable to suspect that Janissary's was no chance robbery——"

"Very square of old Trompey not to pull anything about us, wasn't it? Oh, all right, Hil, I'll watch out for the 'wise-cracking' stuff. I don't pull much of it, anyhow, except when I'm excited. But, say! the first thing we'll have to do, all of us, is to call a board meeting of Amalgamated and all the other things we're interested in, and elect ourselves into the principal offices. 'Cause if we're going to 'slough' our 'make,' we've gotta keep our eyes open for them guys; they're the wise, little poodles when it comes to their own game, and we're going to be typical suckers at it when we start in, and if we don't look out, they'll trim us for the bank roll, hey?"

George Le Fay looked up from his scrollwork with a glance of infinite cunning.

"That's the first wise crack I've heard out of you in years, Morgy! You bet they'll trim us, and I, for one, ain't goin' to give them a chance; I'm goin' to sell out, I am. No playin' any new game for me; I've got a wife and kids to consider, and I'm takin' no chances with my money!"

Axtell, who had been remarkably tractable during the entire day—for even he had been stunned into good nature by the thought of having a share in so vast a fortune—interrupted with one of his old, familiar roars.

"*Your* money, you petit-larceny, cross-town gun!" he bellowed, in fierce contempt. "*Your* money! Don't get so free with *your* money until you get it. And, before you get it, you'll sign the papers to stick to us, or Stephen will hear how you acted last night, and then what you'll get won't make a polo cap for a humming bird—understand?"

"How you ever got in with a gun mob gets me, George," augmented Morganstein, echoing their leader's scorn.

"Selling socks over a counter would be hazardous to a man of your dis-

position, Le Fay," sneered Hilary. "Here, when we have the chance to rank with the rulers of the earth, you talk about your blessed wife and youngsters! Haven't you any pride, dear old chap; any ambition? Does your blood tingle even the slightest bit when you stop to think that we four men who have been spending our lives in eternal fear of the law, now are raised absolutely *above* that law! Why, we can do *anything!* We're more powerful than the Senate and the President put together! Think of what Stephen Janissary was; and then think of what *we'll* be—everything that he was, and all that we can do ourselves added to that! Why, it's stupendous, colossal! Never in the history of the world did a thing like this happen. And *you* talk about your wife and your kids! Why, we should be able to rule this whole, blooming country, if we go about it rightly, and I don't mind telling you that I shall have a shot at it! And I shan't let you interfere, my lad. Mark that!"

What reply Le Fay might have made—and which really would not have mattered anyway—they were never given an opportunity of learning; for, afterward, it was unnecessary, and, at the time, it was prevented by the entrance of Decima Duress—a different Decima this from the girl of the tear-stained and piteously appealing face that Hilary had left in Washington Square the night before; for, about her there seemed to have lingered no trace of the child-woman.

Not knowing, one might have guessed her age far beyond the years that were hers; for her eyes shone with a light that reflected a soul at peace with all the world, and that is the happiness of wisdom, not the sudden, enthusiastic joy of the very young.

Hilary remembered that he had thought of her, with a certain pitying tenderness, as "little." Now she gave no such impression. The attitude of "protecting" that men like to assume toward women was not one to indulge in now. Rather, one would have turned to her for protection.

"Stephen is paying the cabman," she said, including all of them in her bow and grave smile; and then added, directing her words to Hilary: "We are married. I came ahead to thank you, Mr. Quackenbos—and you, too, Mr. Axtell—for insisting last night that Stephen must do his duty. It made me understand that one really does not prove love for their fellow men until they have sacrificed for them. I have not slept since, but it has made—I hope—a good woman of me; not what the world calls 'good,' for that is only an æsthetic temperament or a fear of violated conventions; but a woman worthy to be Stephen's helpmate in the great work that has been given us to do. Without the suffering that I went through last night, I should be only an impulsively generous girl. And so I thank you for keeping him steadfast. It was the *test* of his worth—and the *making* of mine!"

The Englishman and the paralytic exchanged uneasy glances at this undeserved praise, presaging as it did additional difficulties in the task of persuading Stephen to the viewpoints of Mr. Fillimore and his associates. Quackenbos arose, and would have assisted her in the removal of her coat, but she shook her head.

"No! We only came to tell you of our marriage. There is too much work for us to do, and, besides, we must leave the city in less than an hour; get away from people and things until the funeral—it's in three days, and, of course, we must be there. In those three days we'll try to plan out the details of what we are going to do, so that we can tell the public; so we're going to my family home in the Berkshires, away from everybody. Here's Stephen now!"

Three of the four men sat silent, regarding this stranger, who, with hair streaked with gray, and mild but earnest eyes, stood regarding them, smiling affectionately. His presence seemed to dwarf them into men of mean stature. Always huge of frame, he now seemed gigantic.

Only Axtell; who, if men may lack souls, was soulless, spoke:

"Lucky boy, Stephen! You've got the

wife you wanted, and the money you need to carry on your work. Double congratulations. If any man deserved luck, you did!"

Stephen shook his head, his gesture humble.

"No! No, Mr. Axtell, I'm afraid you are prejudiced in my favor. In spite of all the resolutions I made last night, I would have broken every one of them this morning, would have forgotten everything except my desire for Decima and selfish happiness. She's done her best to convince me, aided by Rag, that I am something above the common run of men. But I'm afraid not. To-day has sobered me; made me realize my unworthiness. From now on, I *must* try, night and day, to remember that I have been given what no other man on earth has, the absolute control of many millions of men and women. If they starve, bodily or mentally, I am to blame. In one breath, I must thank some Higher Power for a wonderful chance, and pray to Him for help and guidance, for alone I am not equal to it, and my enthusiasms may bring harm instead of good."

"And it will be sure enough good, too," cried a gleeful voice from the door that the company knew for Rag O'Brien's before they looked up to see.

"I hope so, Rag," said Stephen gently. "Don't try to exalt me, Rag, don't. Keep me humble; tell me of my deficiencies and my lack of knowledge; correct me when I go wrong—which will be many times—but remember that Stephen, your companion, may be good of heart, but very deficient in wisdom. I need counsel, not praise."

"Exactly, my boy," broke in Axtell, to whom no subconscious revelation had come as to the others. His influence was so strong upon George Le Fay that cupidity overbalanced that gentleman's wiser self, and he echoed acquiescence. Stephen turned inquring glances upon them both, but Le Fay's eyes refused to meet his.

"Wheel me to the fire," Axtell added, and Stephen was before the others to do him the service. "Now, listen, Stephen; I'm glad to see your head isn't turned by getting all this money. It's a great compliment to your own nature, and the way we brought you up. You're a bright man, of course, and a brave one; but to manage an estate like Stephen Janissary's requires years of business training. So Hilary has drawn up some papers which we'll all sign before you go away on that trip of yours. These papers turn the Janissary estate into a sort of joint stock company. You're the president, of course; I'm vice president and treasurer; Hilary is the secretary; Morgy and George are on the board of directors with us. We've decided—and I'm glad to see you show signs of agreeing with us—that, for the present, it's best to leave your father's affairs just exactly as they are. Except that, of course, you'll have to call a meeting of Amalgamated and other affairs you're interested in, and elect yourself, by virtue of the stock you hold, to your father's various offices. Then, after that—of course, *I* won't be able to take any active share—you can appoint Hilary, George, and Morgy to such positions as will guard our interests. But, as far as the investments are concerned, you could hardly hope to place your money to better advantage—of course, you agree to that?"

Stephen had been regarding him with wonderment that grew, as Axtell's speech continued, to inexpressible amazement. Had the paralytic been less engrossed with the web of his own weaving, he would have spared himself the trouble of continuing:

"Of course, the income, which will be equally divided into five parts, as usual, will be devoted to our living expenses, and, after that, to the charities each one of us fancies the most. We shall be really able to do some good now, Stephen," he added, pandering to the trait in the young man's nature that had always brought great results before. "It will be a great happiness to us all to know that we can."

Rag laughed outright; nor was it a merely casual laugh, but one that began with a roar and seemed to grow into a gale. Decima's grave smile deepened. Hilary, possessed of no risibilities

worth chronicling, stared; but Morganstein shook his head and chuckled—albeit rather grimly. Axtell's anger found companionship only in Le Fay's.

"You——" he began, but what anathemas he would have coupled with O'Brien's name were stillborn on his lips when he encountered Stephen's gaze, in which sorrow and astoundment were equally present.

"You're joking, aren't you, Mr. Axtell?" asked Stephen quietly.

"Joking! Joking about what?" demanded the paralytic, endeavoring to make up in fury for what he lacked in force.

"Why, about everything! Aren't you?"

"For instance, what? Explain!"

"Why, I won't explain, because I don't believe you are in earnest, Mr. Axtell. About the investments, for instance; as if, for a single instant, you, or any of us, would allow Amalgamated to exist a moment after you took control. As if you wouldn't break it up into all the little companies of which it was originally composed, after the way all of us have railed at the trusts and, particularly, *that* trust. The moment I take control, I'll dispose of Amalgamated right enough! This time next week, there won't be any such thing!"

"Break up Amalgamated, eh?" echoed Axtell, in a white heat of strenuously polite scorn. "Ha! Very good, that! Pray go on! And why, pray?"

"Because, to begin with, it's against the law for such a monstrosity to exist; as you and every one else here have told me innumerable times. If I have the power to break it up, and I permit it to go on existing, I simply encourage other men to form more trusts. Besides, as it stands to-day, I would be unable to administrate its affairs legally and justly. I must resolve it into its hundred corporations. At the head of each of those corporations," he went on eagerly, his eyes taking on the flame of one who is inspired, "I shall place a man who has proven his administrative ability and his honest unselfishness, even if I have to send to England and import the entire Fabian Society. My stock will then be divided among the workers in my fields and factories in proportion to the value of the work that they do, so that each man will be a stockholder, earning in proportion to the gains of the corporation itself—although I shall retain all the voting privileges that go with that stock myself. Because, you see," he explained in extenuation of what he feared might appear somewhat autocratic, "I have no confidence in their ability to select the right men to administer their affairs, and I am taking no chances of my excellent system falling to pieces through the stupidity of those it is intended to benefit. And, if I gave them the voting privileges, they would undoubtedly elect into office those who would flatter them most—and such men are never honest!"

"But you aren't going to let the stupid ones handle *all* their own money, Stephen, you know," Decima put in anxiously, misinterpreting the hostile attitude of Axtell. Stephen smiled, thanking her with his eyes.

"No, naturally not, dearest. I'm glad you reminded me. You see, Axtell, in a coöperative scheme such as I plan for my workmen and associates, everybody will have to do his share. Of course I realize the danger in building up a benevolent autocracy.

"I understand we must take the chance of the next generation of rulers *not* being benevolent; but I can only act according to my lights. First of all, everybody who works for me must be properly housed, fed, and have suitable education privileges for themselves and their children. For that reason I shall have to realize on some of my properties and get a vast amount in ready cash in order to start operations; so I shall sell all my railroad holdings. I select those to sell because I could never be supreme in railroads, anyhow, and, moreover, that is more government business than mine. With the money I realize, I shall build block after block of model tenements—flats in every sense of the word, of course—cottages in the industrial small towns, corporation hospitals, and corporation churches—and in the latter I'll have really re-

ligious men. The workmen in my employ must live in these model tenements or model cottages, and help support the corporation hospitals, churches, and schools.

"I'll have schools for both grown-up folks and children where *truth* will be taught—absolute truth, the truth as you, my friends, all of you, have taught it to me; so that when I, and my generation of assistants and associates die, the people I have trained will be too sophisticated to listen to their flatterers. Religion and education will be used to help and enlighten, not to retard and deceive. And the central point of my educative system will be a great college to which those children who show marked signs of intelligence will be sent and educated in return for service rendered while there; for out of these we will have to choose our future rulers.

"There will be no poverty among those who work for me, for no one who is willing to work eight hours a day will be paid less than will enable him to have what he actually needs to be clean, warm, well fed, and intelligently instructed. My whole system is founded on coöperation and the minimum wage. You remember how we talked about that when I was a little boy, Rag? I wrote it down in a diary once. It's never gone out of my head, that minimum wage thing! Just what the minimum wage shall be will depend on locality, conditions, and so forth; it is one of the many matters that will take a lot of study, adjustment, and readjustment.

"As we build up our system, the question of intelligent amusement—theaters, concerts, and the like—will also shape itself into endowments. But first of all, we must consider the home and the schools. To me as head of the system will naturally accrue enormous revenues. We will endeavor to use these to perfect the system! Oh, I know," he said with a deprecating smile, "the work before us is gigantic, enormous, unending; but it is beautiful work, and the years will pass very swiftly. I will make mistakes, and regret them bitterly, but no one will be able to say I have not done my best, and that's all a man can do, isn't it?"

In the excess of his fury, as he tried to wrench from himself words that his evil anger choked in his gullet, Axtell actually lifted himself bodily in his chair, and, had Stephen not been close at hand to catch him, must have fallen forward into the fire. This fate averted, he lay back in his chair, gasping still for breath that would enable him to excoriate his pupil of his beliefs, yet finding, in his mind, only expressions of horrible hatred for one whom he saw now as the exemplar of all that he most despised.

"The people!" he breathed finally; "the people!—oh, how they'll strip you of every cent, you fool, you prince of fools! The people! The people! Oh, give me some water, or I'll choke!"

"Mr. Axtell," said Stephen gently, "you know that you don't mean what you say. Why, everything I am you have made me. All the good that is in me is yours. If I had grown up as my father's son, I might have been like him, thinking only of himself, careless, scornful of the people. As it is, I try to put the world's welfare before my own—just as you always told me I should."

"You're mad; insane. I'll have you put in Matteawan. Any committee of medical men would send you there if you gave them any such scheme to consider seriously. I tell you you're crazy, Stephen. This fortune has unsettled your brain. Go away into the mountains, and stay there. Forget all these mad socialistic ideas——"

"Mad socialistic ideas! Oh, no, Mr. Axtell; you can't say that! Why, from the time I was old enough to think, you've drilled these 'mad socialistic' ideas into my head. When I was a youngster, I used to get sleepy listening to you talk about the inhumanity of man to man; but you kept me awake, night after night, to tell me about them. The fortune has unsettled *your* brain, not *mine*. You are the one to go away to the mountains and stay there, and forget all these mad *capitalistic* ideas!"

In the glance that passed between

Axtell and Hilary Quackenbos, it was plain that the older man looked upon Hilary as one who had his duty yet to do. The Englishman, therefore, cleared his throat.

"You see, dear old chap," he tried to explain, endeavoring to give an air of easy reasonableness to what he was saying; "like you, when both Axtell and I were younger, we believed ourselves qualified to instruct kings and parliaments, presidents and congresses about government. Since then we've grown wiser; we've realized that things have always gone on this way; that it is useless to try to change them. What the world is, the people in it make it. We can't change the people; therefore, we can't change the world."

"Oh, but you *can* change the people," demurred Stephen immediately. "Look how you changed *me!* Think of what *I* would have been without your instruction; and then think what a *million children* will be when they are instructed as I was! No, no, Hilary! You began as a brave man; you don't want to end as a coward! Don't give up the fight. Stick to me. What we've got to teach the people is that the only true happiness comes from making others happy. That those who live for themselves are like the dumb beasts who know only comfort, *not* happiness. The world is made by those in it, you say. Quite right! I'm *in* it, and I've got a chance to make it different! And I shall! And so this argument ends—right here! The Janissary estate is mine, positively mine! I shall administer it for the people, to whom it rightfully belongs. Are you with me or against me? That's all I came here to know!"

Morganstein crossed the room, and held out his hand.

"'Duke' me, Steve!" he said huskily. "You're a regular fella! If a young Jewish boy's appearance ain't against him in this here Christian movement, I beg leave to git on the band wagon. I told you fellas," he added, turning with a smile to the scowling three; "I told you before about that there guy that made another guy—Finkelstein, was it?—who afterward got too big for him to handle, and he was afraid all the time he'd croak him! Well, I ain't takin' no chances with this here Finkelstein of ours. I'm fur him very strong while I've got the chance tuh be. Better come in, boys, the water's fine—at present!"

"Of course you know where I stand," remarked Rag, taking Stephen's other hand. "And right here is where I beg leave to remark that all you guys oughta be blamed glad that instid of makin' a crook out of Steve, you've made th' grandest little fella on earth. Now, come on; be sports! He's only followin' your dope, you know!"

"What I wanta know," said George Le Fay, after a long interval of silence, "is where I git off?"

"Why, that's very simple, George," returned Stephen, with a laugh. "You'd be chief inspector of the factories. There isn't a cheating dodge that you don't know, and if somebody invented one you'd be the first to find it out. Your job would be to see that nobody tried to get more than what was really coming to him, and your salary would be a hanged sight more than you ever earned. Are you on?"

"Well," returned George, after some study of the matter, "I guess, anyway, I'd 'a' balled up my affairs if I had got that chunk of dough I was expectin'. Somebody 'u'd about sold me the Flatiron Buildin' or a rubber plantation in Honduras, I guess. Why," he exclaimed with sudden enthusiasm, "I'd like to see one of those ginks get my goat with any phony work in them factories!"

He, too, extended the palm of comradeship. One might have found in the production of Stephen's cigarette case the modernized offering of the pipe of peace, for even George, who detested the paper tubes, accepted one.

Axtell found that the renegades were eying him rather curiously; for they knew that, as he went, so did Hilary, a curious attachment—which was not friendship but custom—existing between these two, the original members of the gang.

Rapidly, and with the bitterness of one who has planned too well and found his own weapons used against him, Axtell ran over the history of the assembled "company" from its inception, to this, the end. Where was the great revenge that he was to have wreaked upon all human nature? As Stephen Janissary had failed through his lack of love for his fellow men, so, even more disastrously, had Axtell. As the lily springs from the green slime of the cesspool, striving to atone for its surroundings with its supersweetness, so the foul garden of his hatred had nourished a plant that had blossomed into flowers to heal the hurts of the world.

The fortune was Stephen's; he was The Law. There was no appeal. But one last bit of venom was in his throat, and he spat it forth.

"My lord," he said, bringing down his head in a mock obeisance; "perhaps you will be so good as to tell Hilary and me what you will allow us to be?"

Hilary nodded and spoke seriously.

"Yes, dear old chap; don't forget that. Something *must* become of us, you know! What?"

Stephen tossed away his cigarette, and held out both his hands to Decima. For the moment both lost their gravity; their smiles were gay.

"Sweetheart, will you tell them what we were thinking of doing with them?"

Decima nestled into his arms, and looked at Axtell and Hilary over her shoulder.

"Well," she said, her eyes whimsical, "you remember that college, Mr. Quackenbos—and you, Mr. Axtell—that college where the children are going to be sent for their higher education? Do you? Well, Stephen thought—and I did, too—that, as you'd been so successful in teaching him the things he wants to teach others that—— Oh, Stephen! You tell them!"

"Coward!" he teased. "Well, then, people, it's like this. As this college is founded to teach *your own* principles—the ones you taught to me—I really can't see how I can do anything else except make you both the professors of political economy!"

THE END.

"THE LOST LEGION"—You've heard of it if you are a "constant reader." Francis Whitlock has written a long novel narrating the adventures of Stokeyne, an intrepid Legioner. It will be published serially in the POPULAR. The first part will appear two weeks hence, in the FIRST June issue, on sale MAY 10th

REPUTATION AND REPARTEE

CHARLES C. GLOVER, banker and prominent citizen of the national capital, is exceedingly proud of the part he has taken in developing the beauty of Washington. Not long ago he was before a Congressional Committee which makes appropriations for that city. He was led into a lengthy description of all the things he had done for Washington, and this part of his discourse overshadowed his argument for the project which he was then advocating.

"Mr. Glover, as I understand it," remarked Mr. Tawney, the committee chairman, "you have been one of the great powers for good in this town."

"I believe that is true," agreed Glover.

"It seems strange," continued Tawney, "that Washington has not honored you in some way, such as naming a street after you."

"That has been done," interposed another member of the committee. A pleased look lit up Mr. Glover's face.

"Is that so?" inquired Tawney. "What street is it?"

"It is," said the member solemnly, "a good street. It is 'I' Street."

The After Bulkhead

By Mayn Clew Garnett

Author of "In the Wake of the Engine," Etc.

Told by the chief mate of an ocean liner. How nobility's trunks got mixed with the dunnage of the immigrants who roosted low in the steerage and were paying two pounds sterling for the privilege

I WAS chief mate of the liner, and it was my unpleasant duty to do about everything. Old man Hall, captain and R. N. R. man, did little besides working the ship's position after we got to sea. Ashore, he left everything to Mr. Small and myself, as far as the ship was concerned, and if there was a piece of frayed line, a bit of paint chafed, we heard all about it within two hours after he came aboard.

Small was second under me, while the third and fourth officers were hardly more than apprentices, both being for the first time in the ship and not more than twenty-one or two years of age.

Captain Hall was nearly seventy, and somewhat decrepit, but he was an accurate navigator, and had kept his record clean, making one hundred runs across the Western Ocean without accident. Masters of merchantmen are good or bad according to their records, according to their reputations. Some said Hall had excellent luck. But, anyway, he was a good man, a fair-minded skipper, and he always brought in his ship on schedule, which was saying a good deal, for the Bay Line steamers were not noted for keeping close to time—any old time was good enough for most of them until the *Bay Gregory*, of twenty thousand tons, came along and made the lubbers look up a bit.

She was the largest ship of the fleet—which comprised ten good steamers—and she was fitted with all the modern inconveniences from telephones to wireless, had a swimming pool, barber shop, gymnasium, café, and elevators to the hurricane deck.

With only four watch officers, and six cadets, who were about as useful as a false keel on a trunk, I had enough to do before clearing.

The chief engineer was an American, for a wonder, and his six assistants, including donkey man, were Liverpool cockneys. They drove a swarm of fire rats and coal passers that would have made a seaman crazy in two days, but Smith took things easy below, and, although he had to push her to keep the new record, he let his assistants do the heavy work. That's the reason he grew so fat—grew fat and even-tempered, while poor Small and myself sweated out our lives after the usual routine.

We had forty men in the crew, and needed more, for we often had a thousand emigrants in the steerage. Sometimes we carried bunches of those big chaps from the European forests, Lithuanians, strong, sturdy brutes, totally without sense.

It was in December that we took over five hundred of them on board, and while I was polite as possible, I put Small wise to keep a lookout on the critters. They were miners, for the most part. Contract men, going to the mines in Pennsylvania.

By some means, a quantity of their baggage got below with that of the cabin passengers. We had a lot of cabin folks that voyage. There was a bunch of actors, men and women you hear at the opera, drummers galore, buyers who were coming home from the fall trading, several millionaires; and, among the society or upper-strata people, the ones without occupation to

give them distinction, were the Lady Amadoun and her following.

Lady Amadoun was American born, but French by adoption, or, rather, marriage, preferring in her youth the suave manners of older generations to the rougher ones of her own countrymen. Raoul, Vicomte Amadoun, her husband, had not turned out the soft and gentle creature he appeared before marriage. In fact, he had followed the usual time-worn game of demanding money at unusual crises, which, as you know, has a tendency to make intelligent women think twice before coming across with it. The Vicomtesse Amadoun, or countess, as they called her, was young; in fact, looked hardly twenty-five—but, of course, a countess has maids to fix her up a bit!

You see, being first officer, and sitting at the head of my own table in the saloon, the countess came under my observation more than I intended. Old Hall had his own cronies, who sat with him, and Driggs, the steward, gave the most prominent passenger my right-hand seat—sort of compliment—Driggs was a good steward, and owed his place to my exertions in his behalf.

It was about this confounded baggage that I had a chance to further acquaint myself with nobility, for the trunks of the countess—and she had about fifty, including those of her friends who came with her—got mixed with the stuff that the baggage master had sent by mistake to the first-class baggage room—the unlovely dunnage of the human moles who were roosting low in the steerage, and paying two pound sterling a head for the privilege.

"I would take it as a great favor if you would allow me to get into my baggage by to-morrow at the latest," said the countess, beaming upon me from the adjacent seat at my table at dinner that day. "You see, we've been all over Europe, and while traveling through Russia I picked up some very pretty furs, which will be nice to use on deck during this cool sea weather."

"Madam," said I, "I shall be at your service right after eight bells to-morrow, when I leave the bridge." So I warned the baggage man, below, to have the place cleaned out a mite, so that her ladyship could go below without getting her frock spoiled from contact with the steerage passengers or their belongings.

To be sure that he would do my bidding—he belonged to the purser's force—I went below that morning, and looked the baggage over myself. I passed in through the steerage, and noted the men stowed there. Two big brutes of Lithuanians sat upon their dunnage, and jabbered in their language.

"Hike!" I said abruptly to the pair. "Git away from the baggage, and let the trunk slingers dig up."

"Oh, Mister Mate, Mister Chief, we have our trunks here, also, and want to get to them," answered one fellow, in fairly good lingo.

"Beat it!" I ordered. "Make a get-away as quick as you can. Only first-class passengers can take their baggage out, or get a look-in. Why, you lubber, if every one of you steerage rats wanted to get into your trunks, it would take about fifteen hundred stewards and baggage men to take care of you."

"But it is of great importance that we see our things—there is some things in my trunk I must get at, some important things——"

"Try and fergit them until next Wednesday, when they can be dumped on Ellis Island; nuff sed—no more lingo—beat it!"

The pair went away in very ugly humor, and I started the work of clearing that baggage room of their dunnage, and trying to select the trunks of the countess from the raffle. I managed to get about twenty of them, and let it go at that.

The next day I took the countess below, and personally showed her over the trunks. She was accompanied by the count and her maid.

"Now, Marie, which trunk was it in, *ma chère?* You must remember it very well," she said, looking at the mass of baggage.

"*Mais oui*, it must be that grand affaire—that beeg one—see!" And the

maid pointed to an immense Saratoga trunk, big enough to hold the clothes of a full man-o'-war's crew.

The baggage master and I pulled the trunk out of the ruck, and the count produced a bunch of keys.

I sauntered over to the other side of the room, where the gratings separated the steerage from the rest. The two fellows I saw there yesterday were watching through the slats, and did not notice me.

"*Deux cent,*" said one, in a whisper.

"Whew, *mon Dieu* ——"

I knew that there was something about two hundred, but just what I couldn't quite log. My lingo goes mostly to Spanish and Chink, having sailed to those countries.

The countess asked me to move the big trunk to the side of the ship. I did so without seeing the reason for the extra work, but the lady was gracious, and there was really no reason for not doing it. Two other trunks were opened, and the furs brought out. Then the lady went on deck again, after thanking me most profusely. Raoul was more reticent. He was not the tongue-lashing Frenchman he looked. He seemed preoccupied; but all very rich and powerful men seem that way to me, and after all I was but the chief officer. Perhaps the skipper would have drawn him out more.

Nothing happened until we were within sight of the Nantucket Shoals lightship. That night the countess and her husband were on deck, and, the air being cool, they were well wrapped in furs. I watched them from the bridge. They kept well forward, near the starboard forward lifeboat. That was my boat under the drill orders, and I remembered it afterward.

It was about two bells—nine o'clock—in the evening when there was a most terrific roar from below. The ship shook as though torn asunder. As I gazed aft, the deck seemed to rise and blow outboard. Something struck me heavily, and I was down and out for a few minutes. When I arose with ringing ears, I looked aft again, hardly realizing that I was awake and not dreaming. The siren was roaring full blast, and a throng of men and women were rushing forward toward the bridge. Old Hall came out of his room half dressed, and ran to me.

"What is it—what's happened?" he yelled in my ear.

"Don't know," I howled, and even then I didn't believe I was awake.

The chief engineer ran up.

"Starboard engine room full, sir—something blowed up below—whole side gone above water line—won't float ten minutes," he howled.

"For God's sake, shut off that siren, then!" yelled old man Hall. Then, turning to me, he ordered: "Stand by the boats, and get the passengers out."

In a few minutes the roar of the steam stopped. Hall stood calmly upon the bridge, and gave the orders for the small boats, and away they went one after the other. The wireless was sending its call for help, but there was no time for us to listen to replies; we had plenty to do.

The *Bay Gregory* settled slowly by the stern, and raised her bows high in the air. There she stopped, and, for a wonder, did not fall from under us.

"Get into the boat, quick!" I said to the countess, and she sprang with amazing ease into the stern, followed by her husband and the maid.

"Nix on the men!" I yelled, and grabbed the count. "Come out—women first," and I dragged him from the boat with no show of deference. He struck me savagely in the face, and I stretched him out with the boat's tiller. Seamen tossed him aside, and the swarm of women crowded up and into the craft while I held the men back as best I could.

I knew it was to be a close haul. Seven hundred men and women, and only twenty boats! The life rafts would be doing duty pretty soon, and no mistake.

I saw very little of the fracas around me, as one never does see much if he is tending to his own business, and mine at that time was getting forty-five wom-

en into a small boat, many of them in before she was lowered away.

Luckily there was no sea running at all. It was calm and foggy, the water like black oil.

I slid down the falls, and when we loaded up I took command at the tiller, and went out a little distance to clear the wreck in case of trouble. We lay at rest a hundred fathoms distant, and watched the scuffle aboard. Men yelled like mad, screamed, and fought. I caught the flash of a gun, and heard the report. I knew Hall would not stand for lawless rushing the boats, and was doing some fierce work. Pretty soon the outcry died away more and more, and still the black hull showed plainly, her bow still pointing skyward, and her stern submerged.

"God's blessing, there's no wind or sea!" I said to Driscoll, my stroke oarsman.

"You're right there, cap," said he. "What wus ut anyway?"

"Blessed if I knew—she's just blowed up, whole stern gone out of her. She can't float two hours, and there'll be no one out here before daybreak if they do get the signal."

"You brute!" exclaimed the countess, who was sitting close to me. "Why didn't you let my husband come in this boat?"

"If he was a man, he wouldn't wanted to," I snapped, hot at the insult.

"I notice *you* are here, all right, you ruffian!" she retorted, sneering. "What do you call yourself?"

I thought best not to answer her. Words with women are generally wasted, and the woman always gets the last one, anyhow. The countess had always been so courteous and gentle that I supposed the excitement had turned her head; and then, after all, I had treated her husband a bit rough. He was a gentleman, and I was only a mate. That made a difference in her point of view, although I can't say it did so much in my own.

I talked to Driscoll, and watched the *Bay Gregory* as she lay there in the oily sea. Boats came and went toward the light vessel, and, thinking it would be a good thing to get rid of my cargo, I trailed off after the bunch, and was soon alongside the lightship.

As fast as we could, we sent the women aboard, finding that the little ship would hold hundreds of passengers, in spite of her diminutive size. Inside of half an hour, she had fully five hundred people in her, and was jammed to the rails, below and on deck. Still, it was better than an open boat, and I kept bringing them by scores, until there were no more, save a few boatloads, and these we kept afloat in the lifeboats.

During this time I thought little, or not at all, about the count. The ship still hung by her after bulkhead, and Lord knows the man who set it in her deserves praise enough. How it stood that strain is a wonder to this day. If there had been any sea running she would have gone down like a stone, for no unbraced cross-section of a ship can stand the surge of ten thousand tons in a seaway. It must have burst like blotting paper when wetted down. With ten men—all second-class passengers—in my boat besides the crew, I went back to the ship for the last time, and watched old man Hall as he stood upon the bridge. I could just make him out through the hazy gloom of the night, but I could hear his voice distinctly, as he gave orders to the few men who stayed with him.

"Do you want any more help, sir?" I asked, coming alongside.

"What's that—you, Jack?" he answered. "No, I reckon not. She'll hang on for hours, if the weather remains calm like this. All the passengers safe?"

"All aboard the lightship, or hanging to her by painters—there's a line of boats half a mile long trailing on behind her, and they're safe enough, as they can't get lost as long as they hold to her. Tide runs hard here on the edge of the Stream, but her wireless is going right along, and she says two cutters left Boston half an hour ago, under full steam—ought to be here before late in the morning, anyway. Never lost a man, hey?"

"No," says he, "not that I know of; and that's some remarkable, too."

I thought it was, also, but said nothing more for a few moments, watching the half-sunken hull slowly rolling from side to side in the smooth swell.

While I watched I saw the form of a man coming from aft, along the rail of the main deck, which was just awash. As every one had left the after part of the ship and the engine room abandoned, I thought this strange, and watched the figure until it came almost amidships. Then it disappeared in the cabin.

"More men aft, sir?" I asked Hall, who still stood leaning upon the bridge rail, waiting for help.

"No, no one left aboard—just Jenkins and his crew of four men—myself, that's all." Jenkins was carpenter.

"Saw a man coming from aft, sir—must be some passenger overlooked. Shall I jump up, and see to him?"

"All right," came the response, and almost before he spoke the men who waited on their oars shoved the boat astern until she was almost level with the sunken deck. I sprang out of her, and sung to them to lie by and keep clear of the captain's boat, which lay alongside, just forward of us, waiting until the old man found it necessary to leave.

I made my way in through the passageway to the saloon, and found the deck still clear of water, although the sucking roar and surge of the sea beneath told of the immense volume in the lower decks. The lights had long gone out, with the drowning of the dynamos, and I felt for a cabin door, intending to grab one of the emergency candles which are always in place on the bulkheads.

I found one, and struck a light; then made my way along the passage in front of the lower staterooms, calling at intervals for any one who might be near and unable to realize the peril of a foundering ship. I admit it was some ticklish. I had my hair raised more than once when the ship took a more than usually heavy roll, and the rushing thunders below started with renewed force. What if she should drop? It was a bad thought, and not tending to still my pulse. I couldn't help thinking of the thousand fathoms or so of blue sea beneath my feet——

I thought I heard a footstep crossing the passage in front of me. It is strange how, above the general thunder of rushing water, a slight sound makes itself evident. It was like standing upon the shore during the running of a heavy surf. One can almost talk in a whisper while the thunder reverberates along the coast.

A shadow crossed in front of me, and I hailed again. It was a man, and he was coming from below, from the sunken lower decks. He came up the staircase of the lower saloon, and darted along the passageway to port.

"Hey, there! Stop!" I yelled.

The man turned, and in an instant I recognized him. It was the Vicomte Raoul.

He eyed me with a savage look, and waited for me to come up.

"What ees it you want?" he growled.

"Just you!" I told him. "Don't you know you are in danger of getting killed down here?"

"And how does that matter interest you?" he retorted, with those shrugging shoulders and arched eyebrows he could handle so well.

"It don't, except that, as I'm an officer, it's my duty to see you leave the ship under orders of the captain."

"I noticed you were not so queek to have me leave dees sheep when I first started," he sneered, "and eef I go back for my jewels, my valuables, eet ees no affaire of yours—eh?"

"It is only to the extent that I must see you off the vessel," I said.

We were standing near the after companionway, and I noticed the splintered planking, where the force of the explosion had blown it upward. It was directly over the baggage room, where the trunks were stowed below. This was now under six to ten feet of clear water.

"If you want to get into your trunks, you will have to be a good diver," I

said. "There's no chance in the world of getting below here—she's flooded full to the after bulkheads number four in the wake of the starboard engines. You couldn't do a thing below if you got there."

In a more courteous tone, the count explained:

"Eet is a matter of small valuables in my room, not my trunk. Go along like a good fellow, and I will follow instantly. I just go below to my room —I come with you instantly—go!"

"Well, I'll wait here if it don't take too long," I said. "It's against orders, and if anything happens to you I'll get it, all right. Hurry up, and beat it back—the boat's waiting, and the ship'll drop any minute. It's only that number four bulkhead holding her."

"Ah, yes, dat number four! Eet ees just at my stateroom door, zat number four, you call heem. Wait, my good fellow, I come immediate," and he went down the companionway, which was knee-deep at the bottom in sea water.

He splashed through the shallow wash, and disappeared along the gloomy passage, where the candlelight failed I stood above and waited, holding my breath at times, and cursing the luck that made me weak enough to allow him to do such a foolish thing as go below for valuables. However, I had treated him pretty rough at the first getaway, and felt he had a right to some consideration.

Suddenly I remembered that his stateroom was not below on that main deck! It seemed to me he had rooms forward and above; but the excitement had caused me to forget this detail, and I was so taken up, even at the time, that I only remembered it in a half-dazed way. What did he want below, then?

I waited, and the minutes flew by, seeming long enough. The candle ran its hot grease down upon my hand, and burned it. I was getting sore and impatient at the wait. If anything happened, I could never be given a reprimand, for I would never show up to receive it. The ship would go down and take me with her, all right enough. I hadn't a chance in the world—and I was waiting there for a count, a man who had sprung into the mate's boat to get clear, when there were hundreds of women waiting and screaming to go!

There was a sharp explosion from below. The ship shook a little, and rolled to port.

"Just Heaven! Did that bulkhead go?"

A form tore down the passageway, splashed through the water at the foot of the companion, and was upon me in an instant. Raoul struck me fairly between the eyes, and I went down to sleep—that was all I remember of the inside of the *Bay Gregory,* as she lay foundering off the Shoals.

When I came to, I was in the boat, with Driscoll bending over me and pouring sea water upon my head. The dark stain showed me that I was bleeding fast, and the sailor tore off the sleeve of his jumper, and tied it about my forehead. I tried to sit up, but everything swam and rolled about me horribly. Finally I managed to get my head up.

"What's happened?" I asked.

"Bulkhead gave way, sir," he told me. "You was hit on the head by wreckage. I run in after you, an' jest managed to git you clear. She's gone, sir!"

"What! The ship?" I cried.

"Sure, sir."

"And the old man—Jenkins, and the rest of them?"

"All got clear just in time—seems like Jenkins and his gang were at the bulkhead from forrads, trying to shore it up, when *bing!* she went, and them as was left beat it—all got clear, sir."

"See anything of a passenger—that chap we had a run-in with at the first getaway?" I asked.

"Yes, sir; one man got away in the skipper's boat—that's them headin' for the lightship over there," and he pointed to a blur that showed through the hazy night. I began to gather my senses again, but I couldn't make head or tail of it. What did that fellow nail me for? I had hit him, to be sure; but that was for a purpose. He surely in-

tended to fix me, all right. About a minute more, and I would have gone with the ship.

"Cowardly rat!" I whispered.

"Who?" asked Driscoll.

"That white-livered dog who knocked me out," I said, gritting my teeth at the thought.

"Better lie quiet, sir; better keep still—you're bug a bit, but will be all right to-morrow. Does it hurt you much, sir?"

"Shut up!" I commanded ungratefully, and Driscoll gazed at me sorrowfully, pulling away again at his oar, for we were now almost to the lightship.

All that night we lay trailing astern. There was a long line of lifeboats reaching nearly half a mile back, all hanging to the taffrail of the ship.

About daylight she got in touch with a passing passenger ship, bound in, and while we were busy shifting the hundreds of passengers the cutters showed up, and helped to expedite matters by towing the small boats. Before breakfast time we had all the outfit aboard and away for New York. Hall and myself went aboard the cutter *Eagle*. We waited for several hours, to see if there was anything more to find drifting about, and then away we went for home, thanking the captain of the Nantucket Shoals lightship for what he had done.

"I don't understand it at all—don't seem to be just right," repeated Hall over and over to the captain of the cutter. "She just blew up—that's all there is to it. We had a drove of miners aboard, and you know how hard it is to keep those fellows from carrying explosives in their dunnage. You simply can't stop to search them. There was probably a couple of hundred pounds of blasting powder, at the least —went off like a mine blowing up a battleship. That bulkhead in the wake of the starboard engine room saved us —that's all!"

I was out of a ship. When we got in, the manager laid me off for a month, and then gave me the second greaser's berth on the old *Bay Leander,* a bum ship—and that's a fact. When I reached the other side again, I saw by the papers that a certain Frenchman had tried to collect nearly a million francs on his insurance for cargo and personal belongings in the *Bay Gregory*. It seems that he had shipped tons of expensive machinery, and had insured it fully. The stuff was cased tightly, but one case marked for him had broken while being handled on the dock, and nothing but bricks fell out.

The insurance companies held up the claim. I hurried to the consul's office, and told of the episode of the trunk, and how I was hit over the nut by a certain French gentleman during the fracas. The description answered to the man of machinery, and when I told of that last little crack I had heard below, the consul waited not on the order of his going, but ordered a cab and fairly threw me into it. We tore to the office of the underwriters, and I told my tale. Then I began to see the light, at last.

It was the old game tried under a new guise—and it had nearly cost the lives of a half thousand human beings. The horror of it appalled me, and I found myself wondering if I was to be trusted about without a nurse again. However, I was not censured severely. The crook was well known to the police, and since then the police of many countries have been trying to locate a gentleman who answers to the description of the Vicomte Raoul de Amadoun.

ANOTHER WAY TO MOVE FURNITURE

An old negro teamster, who has a stable near the Navy Yard, in Washington, has this proud inscription over his door:

FURNITURE MOVED WITH CARE AND PIANOS.

Spring Fret

LET'S get away—
No matter where,
Only, I'm weary of the same old places,
Sick of the same old sights, the same white faces
That pass in endless sameness, day by day.
Let's get away—
South where the hot stars flare
In softer skies,
Or westward to the land of great emprise;
Friend of my heart, are you not worn with care,
Tired of this little round of work and play?
Let's get away!

Let's get away—
To any distant dreamland that we may;
East, where the priests of Buddha chant and drowse
In ancient temples where the light is gray;
East, where the Tartar warriors held carouse
When all the world resounded to their tread
In days long dead;
East, where the sounds and sights,
The queer, sweet, spicy smells
Cast magic spells,
Luring the pilgrim by their strange delights;
Mayhap we'll win a kingdom in Cathay—
Let's get away!

Let's get away—
North where the cold lights glare
Above the grim array
Of bergs and ice floes, merciless and bare;
South, east, or west—what matters it, the path that we may fare
If only we can get away, away to—anywhere!
The stir and surge of spring
Are in my blood; my pulses throb and sing
With fierce, hot wanderlust that's stronger far
Than "reasons" are;
And cunningly it urges me to go
Again to know
The folly and the freedom of the road,
To quit my task, my duty, my abode,
And staff in hand
Follow the trail that leads to No Man's Land.
Friend of my heart, I need you, come and share
The fortune of the road with me—the sunshine and the air,
The calm and storm—the dark days and the gay;
Are you not ready for this glad essay?
—Let's get away!

BERTON BRALEY.

Kid Caldwell: Good Samaritan

By Robert V. Carr

Author of "The Foolishness of Kid Caldwell," "Love Lyrics of a Cowboy," Etc.

Without very much trouble you can classify the majority of the men you meet. But you can't push Kid Caldwell into any of the pigeon holes that are filled with average humanity. He is in a class by himself. You might label him a "bad man," but how can a "bad man" be a "Good Samaritan?"

MORTIMER BLUND was unversed in knowledge regarding habits of horses—to the deplorable extent of walking along a narrow and dangerous trail in the Short Pine Buttes with the bridle reins looped over his shoulder.

The trail wound round the edge of a cliff that fronted a dry watercourse. Suddenly some animal crashed out of the underbrush on the opposite side of the draw, and the saddle horse reared back with an attack of equine nerves. At the same time Mortimer Blund was jerked around and over the cliff. The startled horse stood for a moment with head held high and nostrils quivering. Then, with neck curved so that he might not step on the trailing bridle reins, he proceeded on his way, the pack horse obediently following.

When Blund recovered sufficiently from his fall to take stock of his hurts, he found that his ankle was injured. Apparently he had struck with his full weight on one foot, the ankle had turned, and he had fallen back on some rocks, about fifteen feet below the level of the trail. His hands were bleeding, and the side of his head was bruised. He attempted to rise, but found that procedure an agony. He was dizzy and sick.

For a time he lay quiet, then again he attempted to rise. Summoning all his strength, he gripped a near-by sapling, and half dragged himself to a sitting posture.

After a time, it came to him that he was in a serious predicament. He was about eighty miles from a settlement, and unarmed, for in walking up the narrow trail he had unbuckled his belt and hung it on the saddle horn.

Clutching the sapling, he finally drew himself up on his uninjured foot. Gingerly he touched the ground with the hurt one, and pressed a little weight upon it. It crumpled beneath him like paper.

"Helpless as a child," he muttered.

With the sapling's aid, he eased himself again to the ground, and fumbled for his pipe and tobacco. A terrible twinge of pain in his ankle halted the operation. With bruised and bleeding fingers, he began unlacing the heavy shoe.

An inquisitive magpie sailed across the cañon, dropped down a few feet from him, and stared at him with bright, curious eyes.

Blund halted in the tedious unlacing of his shoe, and, with a sudden gust of anger, yelled at the bird:

"Get out!"

The magpie gave a mocking, raucous cry, and flew to a near-by tree, where it perked its head insolently.

"Go away!" yelled Blund. "I ain't dead yet."

It was his belief that magpies were scavengers, and that they instinctively knew when any animal was mortally hurt.

"That bird thinks he's due to pick my bones—ah—oh—there!" And he pulled off the heavy shoe, and rolled

down the stocking. The ankle was badly bruised and discolored.

Blund hit upon a plan. He would wrap his stocking around his ankle, and about the stocking he would tie his shoe lace. He could not stand the heavy shoe rubbing about the throbbing ankle.

But what should he do next? He could not walk. About all there was left to do was to call for help. It was a ludicrous and silly thing to do, he thought, to cry for help in a wilderness. But he raised his voice in a lugubrious howl.

"Hay-a-a-a-a!" he howled. "Hay-a-a-a-a!" the cañon echoed, and then the magpie gave a mocking, rasping squawk, and sailed away in graceful flight.

Again Blund yelled, "Hay-a-a-a!" and again the cañon echoed his weird cry.

A sense of desolation and hopelessness swept over him. He was alone in a country where everything was cruel. The sun was cruel. The pallid cliffs of limestone and gypsum were cruel. The animals lurking in the shadows were swift and hardy and cruel. There was nothing but what was harsh and cruel.

Now, in the city, if a man was injured, he had protection and certain rights. He would be immediately picked up and taken to a hospital, and looked after and cared for. Out here, he could die, and the magpies could pick his bones, and no one would ever know anything about it.

Mortimer Blund was known as a brave man, and courageous. But his deeds had always been done among a thick press of people. He had done many things that required cold nerve, but always was that thick press of people about him.

But now in that stony cañon, and amid that appalling loneliness, he whimpered. He felt as if the very spirit of the country was leagued with torture and death—a lonely death, a slow death. Here he was, helpless; and he might shriek himself hoarse, and always would come that fiendish echo.

He remembered the trail from Night Hawk—eighty miles of sage and gumbo flats, steep cañons, and water-worn hills—and he had not met a human being. He had been informed by a citizen of Night Hawk that the buttes were the winter range for the Three-Seven cattle outfit, and that no one lived in there.

"Of course, a rock pounder like you," the Night Hawkite had added, "might meet up with Kid Caldwell, but he hain't sociable to speak of. Maybe he's in the buttes, an' maybe he ain't. They say he sometimes hangs around up there."

"I am entirely satisfied," Blund had replied with what he deemed the manner befitting a scientist, "to be alone. I am simply hunting for some specimens—as I have said before—which I understand are plentiful in the Short Pine Buttes."

The talkative citizen of Night Hawk had rolled a cigarette, and leaned against the cribbed hitching rail.

"You kin git 'most anything you want in this country," he had returned darkly.

II.

Enlarging on Mortimer Blund's Night Hawk experiences, it may be well to state he deemed it the proper thing to treat the citizens of that dusty hamlet to a round of drinks before departing on his journey. He beckoned the way into the Dew Drop Inn.

"Have something on me," he said genially.

The leading citizens of Night Hawk lined up at the bar. For some unaccountable reason, a short man, with a fierce mustache faded by the sun to the color of old rope, hung back. Blund beckoned him.

"Come on and join us."

The short man approached Blund rather meekly. In his hand he held a chunk of ore spotted with gleaming bits of yellow metal.

"You're a expert," said the short man humbly, "a expert on rock, they tell me. Here's something I'd like to know about." He handed over the specimen. Blund looked at the piece of ore gravely. Of course, the yellow stuff was gold, and it excited Blund for a mo-

ment. Solid cubes of the yellow metal projected from the ore.

"I would call that gold," he said, with an air of superior wisdom.

"You think it's gold?" the short man queried, his saddle-colored face blank and expressionless.

"Sure; any one could see that was gold," replied Blund.

For a subtle reason known to them all, the crowd resumed their old positions of ease, leaving their drinks untasted. Blund stared at them open-mouthed.

The bartender turned suddenly, and busied himself with some glasses on the back bar.

Then the little man burst into a hoarse laugh. He guffawed until the tears stood in his eyes. His merriment taking on a more concrete form, he flung his hat on the floor, and jumped on it.

The bartender, having finished his arduous toil with the glasses on the back bar, turned, and for a moment looked at the specimen reposing on the bar where Blund had placed it. Then the dispenser of drinks, being of a coarse, heavy type, bellowed his amusement.

Presently the short man picked up his hat, placed it jauntily upon his head, and passed out with a grotesque wink at the bartender, which caused that worthy to bellow afresh.

The entire affair mystified Mortimer Blund. And about it all was a disagreeable sense of danger. Still, they might just be poking fun at him. But, then, why the abandoned drinks, which the bartender had, without remark, emptied under the bar? He walked out rather stiffly.

Before the door closed behind him, he heard the heavy voice of the bartender: "Shorty's the keen one—iron pyrites—fool's gold!" Then again came the bellow of mirth.

Blund noted that the short man had disappeared. He was glad that the humorist had not lingered, for there was something about him that Blund did not like. Beneath his coarse laughter, there seemed to be lurking a purpose—a plan—and the plan seemed to spell danger. It was all hidden, but Blund sensed peril, and it came to him that its source lay close to the little man with the rope-colored mustache.

When he began to pack—for Blund had outfitted in Night Hawk—he called to some loungers in front of the Dew Drop Inn.

"I need some help in packing that horse. I'll pay for it," he said, in the brief, impersonal way of a man making a trivial purchase.

One of the loungers detached himself from the group, and proceeded to explain the mysteries of a diamond hitch.

"I guess you hain't never been out on a trip like this before," said the diamond-hitch expert tentatively, and with averted face.

"No; not with a pack horse," acknowledged Blund.

"Never done much rock huntin' in the West, then?" queried the Night Hawkite, with polite distinterestedness, flinging the rope deftly over the pack.

"No; my work has been largely in foreign countries."

"So?"

"Yes." Blund resolved to give a final explanation of the cause of his presence in Night Hawk. "I have always heard there were many rare minerals in this section, and I propose to investigate the matter to my own satisfaction. My life has been spent in pursuit——"

"Of rocks," interrupted the citizen of Night Hawk innocently, as he put the finishing touches on the diamond hitch.

"Yes; you might call it that."

"Know all about rock?"

"Certainly," replied Blund, with some show of dignity.

The Night Hawk gentleman turned away. "Hope you git what you're lookin' fer," he said abruptly.

The Westerner's remark was lost on Blund. He reached in his pocket, to pay for the tying of the diamond hitch. But his erstwhile assistant had already joined the loungers in front of the Dew Drop Inn. Blund felt a little embarrassed.

"How much do I owe you?" he called.

The loungers were silent, seemingly intent upon the antics of a playful kitten held by one of their number.

Somewhat puzzled, Blund replaced the money in his pocket, mounted his saddle horse, and, gripping the pack horse's rope, fared forth.

"Good-by," he called to the group in front of the Dew Drop Inn.

But the loungers still preserved their puzzling silence, and, still absorbed with the kitten, failed to see the departing mineralogist.

III.

Now, it seemed to Blund, as he sat there in that lonely cañon, nursing his injured ankle, that there was a similarity between the raucous cry of the magpie and the laughter of the short man. Both of them were cruel, and with a cruelty that vexed him mysteriously. And the specimen—what was there about a gold specimen to excite laughter?

Again he raised his lugubrious cry of "Hay-a-a-a." And again the cañon echoed.

Then his heart seemed to come up in his throat, for he heard a voice behind him. In a low, natural tone it said: "What's the trouble?"

Blund turned his head slowly, as if fearful of seeing a ghost. He had heard no one approach. He had been sitting there howling, and suddenly to hear a voice almost at his elbow was a shock to the already overwrought nerves of—the scientist.

He beheld a slim young man, clad in a flannel shirt, a pair of nondescript corduroys, and moccasins. The youth was heavily armed. Blund noted that his face was as smooth as a girl's, and that his eyes held the watchful, unflinching look of some fierce, wild thing. He reminded Blund of an eagle he had once seen in captivity.

"You gave me quite a start," said Blund. "I guess my ankle's in bad shape." His thick body shuddered a little, and, as he looked up at the youth, his small, ferretlike eyes were dull with pain.

"So?" noncommitally.

"Yes; I was going along with the bridle reins looped over my shoulder. Deer or something frightened the horse. He jerked back, and I fell over that cliff."

"Let's look at it," suggested the youth. He bent over, removed the stocking, and examined the injured ankle. "Jes' a bad sprain; that's all," he said, with a conclusive shortness.

"It's certainly not pleasant," observed Blund, making a wry face; "I can't even stand on it."

"How long you been here?" inquired the youth.

"Good share of the afternoon," replied Blund, feeling for his watch.

"Why didn't you use your gun instead of hollerin'?"

"Didn't have any," explained Blund simply. "It's hanging on the pommel of my saddle."

The youth was surveying the injured man meditatively. He noted the heavily molded face and the wrinkles about the little eyes that told of middle age. He observed the bulk of the shoulders, the deep chest, and the powerful arms. He also noted that the tan on the thick, short neck was several shades lighter than the tan on the cheek—the collar mark of the city dweller. Arriving at a conclusion, the young man announced:

"I'm goin' to pull you through, but you'll have to do what I tell you."

"Go ahead! Anything you say goes," agreed Blund, gingerly replacing the stocking about his ankle.

The scientist's new-found friend started toward a clump of trees up the cañon. "I'll be back in a second," he assured him, and presently returned, leading a horse.

With some difficulty he got Blund into the saddle.

"Now," said the young man tersely, "I'm goin' to blindfold you." He slipped a foot into the stirrup and raised himself up behind Blund.

As the Easterner felt a handkerchief pressed across his eyes, and deft fingers knotting it securely, he said, somewhat protestingly:

"I don't know your game, but I don't just see the use of this."

"Keep that where it is, an' don't touch it," said a soft voice close to his ear. Blund noted that with all its softness there was a certain menace in that voice—a vibrant, dangerous note.

At that moment a great idea came to Blund. Why had he not thought of it before? He turned his head, and spoke to his companion.

"Surely," he half questioned, "I should know the name of the man who has been so kind to me?"

The answer was rather disconcerting: "What you don't know won't hurt you."

"It can't be," said Blund rather foolishly, "that you are Kid Caldwell?"

"Suit yourself," came the laconic reply.

Blund was silent. It seemed that he was always making mistakes in this country. All of his superior cunning, all of his vaunted knowledge of human nature, seemed of no avail among these apparently simple people. He dimly realized that there was a new kind of sagacity in their curt speech and aloof manners.

But this young man behind was Kid Caldwell; of that he was positive. The description given him tallied exactly with this youth who had picked him up. The blindfolding settled the matter. Doubtless the outlaw was taking him to some lonely retreat, and did not desire him to know the trail to his secluded camp. In that Blund was correct.

It seemed an age before the youth pulled in the horse. Blund was suffering excruciating torture with his ankle, but made no sign. He was once more in command of himself. He was with a human being, and his world had to a certain extent righted itself.

The young man helped him to dismount, and half carried him into a place that smelled musty as a cave smells. Removing the blindfold, the youth assisted him to a bed of spruce boughs.

"Lie down, an' I'll fix that ankle."

Blund obeyed, and right gladly, too. His host disappeared, and presently returned with a can of water and a flask of whisky. He unwound the stocking and began bathing the ankle. After in a measure subduing the pain, he passed over the flask of liquor, and ordered:

"Take a shot o' that."

Blund took a deep draft. Finally the young man soaked a piece of blanket in water and wrapped it about the ankle.

"That's better," sighed Blund in relief.

"I'm not through yet—I'll have to fix up that head," and with skillful hands he washed the bruise, and, at a loss for a bandage, he fumbled beneath the blankets at the head of the bed, and brought forth a clean white undershirt. Without hesitation, he jerked off a sleeve, and wrapped it about Blund's head, snugly tucking in the ends.

"Feel good? All right. I got to git somethin' to eat now," with quick adaptability, beginning some culinary operations at the mouth of the cave—for it was a cave, with some brush piled against one side of the entrance.

The meal that the young man brought his guest was simple. It consisted of some fried venison, a huge flapjack, and a tomato can full of hot coffee.

"Throw that into you, an' you'll feel better," he said.

He then left the cave, but returned just as Blund was finishing the last scrap of the flapjack.

"Enough?"

"Yes; thank you," replied Blund, with a long sigh.

"Smoke?"

"Sure; got a pipe and tobacco in my clothes somewhere." Blund began searching awkwardly with his bruised hands for his pipe and tobacco.

His host glided quickly to his side. "Let me help you." His slim, deft hands began feeling about Blund's body. Finding the pipe and tobacco, he gave them to his guest, and once more retreated to the opposite side of the cave.

Already the shadows were gathering in their retreat; and, as Blund lit his

pipe, the youth observed that it was "about time to turn in."

"If you don't mind," said Mortimer Blund, "I'd like to have you take another turn at that ankle."

The request was complied with swiftly. He bathed and rubbed the swollen part until Blund remarked that he felt but little pain, and believed he could go to sleep.

But Blund did not sleep. Between partially closed lids he watched the youth furtively. The young man spread a blanket on the rock, and dropped down like a tired young animal. In the deepening gloom, Blund could not discern whether he unbuckled his cartridge belt or not.

Blund made up his mind to stay awake. He strained his ears to catch the sound of his host's breathing; but apparently the youth was a light sleeper, for he listened in vain. Now he was fighting against an overwhelming drowsiness. Exhausted and worn with the events of the afternoon, he found it increasingly difficult to keep awake. Anyway, why should he keep awake? Of course there were some things on his person that he would not care for the youth to see. But apparently there was no guile in the young man.

A wave of weariness swept over him. He would take a little nap, and then —— But even as the thought flashed through his mind he had fallen asleep, and his stertorous breathing sounded through the cave.

A shadow drifted to the side of Mortimer Blund. Light, deft fingers felt him over and presently secured a packet. Silently the shadow drifted to the mouth of the cave and was gone; in a little while it returned and replaced the packet.

When Mortimer Blund awoke, it was broad daylight, and his host was preparing breakfast.

"How's the ankle?" inquired the young man in his abrupt, crisp style.

"Better," replied Mortimer Blund, yawning.

"I got your horses," the youth informed him.

"Well, that's good," said Mortimer Blund. "You must have got up early."

"I always git up early," replied his host.

IV.

There came a day when Mortimer Blund could rest his weight on his ankle and feel comparatively little pain. He hobbled about the cave, and even ventured down to the spring.

"You're doin' pretty well," observed his host.

"Fine," said Blund enthusiastically.

The days had passed uneventfully. The youth prepared the meals, and about all there was for Blund to do was to think. He thought a great deal. There was always a great problem he was trying to solve.

The youth was always armed, and never once had he permitted Blund to get close to him in the cave. He would bring his guest food, but always with a certain caution. He talked little. Once Blund caught him looking at him with his big gray eyes in a fashion the Easterner admitted he did not like.

It was a warm, bright afternoon when the youth slipped into the cave and informed his guest that he must prepare to leave for Night Hawk the next day. Then it was that Blund arrived at certain conclusions.

The youth's rifle was leaning against the wall of the cave. Blund, with a slight limp, walked over to it with an air of interest. It was a beautiful and costly weapon, and the sunlight streaming in through the mouth of the cave gleamed upon some silver work in the stock.

"Pretty gun that," said Blund, picking up the weapon.

"Yes," agreed the youth carelessly.

Blund threw down the lever, and a cartridge flipped up and dropped on the floor. He brought the lever back and noted another cartridge slip smoothly into the barrel. He turned swiftly, and brought the muzzle of the gun to bear on the youth.

"Hands up, Caldwell!" he called sharply.

But the youth did not put up his hands.

Instead he asked simply: "What fer?"

"Because I've got you," snarled Blund. "Put 'em up—quick!"

Kid Caldwell raised his hands slowly, and then his face—usually so masklike—became as if transfixed with horror.

"Back o' you, man!" he cried, with vehement warning; "rattlesnake!"

Blund whirled, with starting eyes. It was only a split second, but it was enough.

When Mortimer Blund again confronted his host, the youth's hand held a cocked gun, and his body was well out of the rifle's line of fire.

"Drop it," commanded Kid Caldwell softly. "Drop it or lose a hand."

The rifle clanged to the floor of the cave.

"Go over there and set down; I'm going to talk to you," said the Kid.

Blund obeyed sullenly, seating himself on the bed.

The Kid replaced his gun in the holster, came over, and surveyed his guest.

"What fer did you try to git the drop on me?"

"Oh, don't talk to me," cried out Blund angrily.

A smile crept into the Kid's eyes. "What did I ever do to you?" he inquired gently.

"Nothing," admitted the still surly Blund.

"You're a detective, hain't you?" pursued the Kid sweetly.

"Well, what of it?" Blund was very much mortified with his own bungling methods.

"Sent out by the railroad to take me in?"

"Huh!" snorted Blund. "You must 'a' frisked me."

"'Frisked' you! What's that?" inquired the Kid innocently.

"Went through my clothes," snapped Blund impatiently.

"Yes," drawled the Kid, "I did look you over some. But what gits me is why you want to git the drop on me?"

"I'm an officer, and you're a holdup," replied Blund severely, as if that settled the entire affair.

"But you say you have nothin' agin' me?"

"No."

"Then why do you want to git me?"

"What you ringing in a third degree on me for?" burst out Blund desperately.

"'Third degree?'" echoed the Kid.

"Yes; ask questions, ask questions, keep asking them!"

"Uh-huh! But don't you know you couldn't git the drop on me?"

"Well, I had, but I'm——"

"'Fraid of rattlers, hey?"

Blund shuddered.

"No, you didn't have the drop on me," explained the Kid as an elder speaking to a refractory child. "I could 'a' killed you before your finger touched the trigger." A yellow butterfly drifted into the mouth of the cave and fluttered softly down on a tiny point of rock. "See that butterfly?" said the Kid. His gun seemed to jump from the holster—and bang!—there came a roar, and wisps of powder smoke drifted lazily toward the mouth of the cave. Where the butterfly had rested was a gray splotch—the leaded scar of the bullet. "Jes' to show you—that's all," said the Kid modestly, "how sudden you might 'a' passed in your checks." He carelessly dropped his gun into the holster.

Blund made no reply. He was beginning to get a different viewpoint. He had invaded many a den of criminals, desperate safe crackers, murderers, and ex-convicts; but here was a different species of quarry. In all his experience as a police officer and detective, he had worked on the assumption that all criminals at heart were cowards; that they would take no chances; that they always struck in the dark when all was in their favor. He had never found one that would look him in the eye.

But this one—this Kid Caldwell—whom a great railroad company had sent him out with a promise of a huge reward to capture—he could not classify.

There was a light in this outlaw's eye that Blund could not understand. It was a light that seemed to tell of a higher range of things—a knowledge of a higher form of danger already dared and made mock of.

It now occurred to the detective that Caldwell could have killed him at any time. Why had he not done so? The detective looked at the youth with a sense of awe that puzzled him.

He was a mere boy, that was plain enough, probably twenty-three or twenty-four; slim, smooth-faced; but the eyes—the detective wished that he did not have to look Caldwell in the eyes.

"But you haven't really told me what you tried to git the drop on me fer?" patiently insisted the Kid.

"My duty," said the detective abruptly.

"Duty to what?"

"The law."

"What law?"

"For the love of Heaven, man, don't you know anything!" The outlaw's question sounded idiotic to the detective.

"I said, 'What law?'" The Kid bent upon him a somber and disconcerting gaze.

"The law of the United States," replied Blund uneasily.

"Who made it?"

"Aw, fergit it!" In his anger the detective was dropping into the vernacular of his police-force days.

"I never fergit anything," said the Kid quietly; "I asked you who made this law."

"Lawyers, of course."

"Are you workin' fer lawyers?"

"No."

"Railroad company?"

"This time; yes."

"Did they help make the law?"

"No."

"I thought you said your duty was to the law."

Blund suddenly turned an admiring gaze on the Kid. "It's a pity you weren't a lawyer," he observed not unpleasantly.

The intended compliment was lost on the Kid. "What I want to know is the real reason you're after me."

Rather hopelessly, Blund answered: "The real reason is that I'm a man hunter by trade and need the money."

"Why didn't you say so in the first place? Shorty had you sized up right. You thought pyrites was gold. Huh, an' you thought you could git me." The Kid smiled with his eyes—a smile that passed like a shadow. "I guess you're new to this country," the outlaw went on in his old, gentle style. "I travel alone mostly, but I has friends—even in Night Hawk I has friends; an' when they thinks I'm goin' to have visitors they sort o' drifts up to a place I knows of an' leaves a note or something. If you'd 'a' had your gun an' been in shape, we might 'a' had a little row, maybe." He made a slight gesture as if the affair of a dispute with Blund would have been of little moment. "But of course you bein' hurt an' helpless changed it all; an' then you came in an' ate my grub. You can't fight a man what eats your grub. Nor you can't fight a cripple."

But the detective, trained only in the customs of civilization, could not follow the Kid's idea. If he himself were after a man, he would do anything to get him; it would be justifiable. He remembered having made friends once with an absconding cashier; secured his trust and confidence; and then, when the time was ripe, snapped the handcuffs on him. The Kid might as well have addressed him in Sanskrit as to have talked of the sacredness of hospitality. The Kid was a fool in that respect, thought Blund.

"I kin see that you're new to the country," continued the Kid gently; "an' I kin overlook a lot of things. But you hadn't ought to try to git the drop on a man what has fed you an' took care o' you. Do you think that's right?"

"That is not the question," growled Blund doggedly; "I did my best to get you and failed; that's all."

"You think that's all?" queried the Kid softly. "You're dead sure that's all?"

Blund looked up at his host, but he could not stand the gaze of the Kid's eyes. "Why—I—suppose so," he faltered.

The Kid suddenly sprang into action. His hand flashed to his gun, and in a breath the muzzle was over the heart of the detective. "Lay down!" came the sharp command. Blund obeyed swiftly. Still holding the gun on the detective, the Kid backed to a corner of the cave and secured a rope. It became apparent to Blund that he was about to be tied—trussed up like a calf going to market.

With a deft left hand, the Kid looped the rope about his guest.

Blund could see no opening in the Kid's defense, and it would be useless to struggle. The outlaw would kill him as a candle is snuffed out. Surely he would not leave him there. Probably wanted to secure him until he made a trip to——

"Now," said the Kid sweetly, as he looked down at the bound detective, "I'm goin' to do a little Injun work with you. I see you're a-scared o' snakes." All his life Blund had been in deadly fear of snakes and toads—a fear given him by his mother. He shuddered with a terrible apprehension. "So I've got a rattler out there, an' I'm goin' to leave him with you fer company. An' I hope——"

As the ghastly purpose of the outlaw dawned on the detective, his face changed from stolid indifference to frantic fear. The cords in his neck stood out, and he began a vain struggle to free himself. Again that shadowy smile came into the Kid's eyes.

"I'll put him on your chest an' in time——"

Blund began gasping for breath. "Oh, you wouldn't—you wouldn't do such a thing," he whispered hoarsely, with the dreadful inarticulateness that comes with a nightmare.

"Sure," said the Kid serenely. "You kin git ready to welcome his snakeship in about a minute."

Blund turned a ghastly, convulsed face to the outlaw. His lips were twitching and his eyes rolling. "I can stand anything—kill me—anything—snake—no—my mother before I was born—oh! don't—don't—don't——"

But the Kid did not seem interested in the fears of the mother of the detective. The outlaw started for the entrance of the cave.

With one despairing shriek, Blund made a final appeal: "Come back! I'll go away—anything—you can't harm a man who is eating your grub——" It was the last plea of a soul winding down in the depths. The Kid paused. "Sounds like what I said," he remarked, as if not quite positive he was being quoted correctly.

"Yes, yes," implored Blund, "you said it—you said it!"

"Well, if I said it," the Kid spoke naturally and as if engaged in commonplace conversation. "If I said it, I suppose I'll have to stick to it." He returned and released the detective from his bonds.

Blund sat up feebly. He felt as if he had suddenly grown very old. His courage was gone. Never again would Mortimer Blund face danger of any kind. The certainty of this overwhelmed him. He had failed to conquer his greatest fear, and his days as a hunter of men were ended.

His case was not unusual. Prize fighters experience it, soldiers experience it, and all men that follow dangerous callings are liable to experience it. How often is heard that expression, "He lost his grip!"

The Kid looked him over with the eye of an expert. "I guess I won't have to bother with you any more," he said tersely.

The outlaw was not horrified at the death of a man's courage. He had at times wondered at the passing of that quality in men known as "nerve," but it held no appalling features for him. Yet the Kid had not harmed his guest. He had hewn close to the line in the matter of hospitality. Doubtless there was not a rattlesnake within forty miles of the cave. Seldom did a snake penetrate the upper levels of the buttes, preferring the foothills and the cacti flats where the prairie-dog villages flour-

ished. The Kid had simply discovered the detective's pet fear and played on it as a skillful musician plays upon an instrument.

"Could I have a drink of water?" asked Blund rather pathetically.

"Of course," replied the Kid gently. "Help yourself. Anything I've got is yours."

Blund dragged himself wearily across the cave, and drank long and deep from the battered tin bucket.

The Kid slipped to the entrance of the cave. "I won't be with you tonight. Be back in the mornin'. Be ready to hit the trail."

Blund came up to the outlaw with hand outstretched. "Do you have to go?" he asked, with an odd gulp.

"No-o-o," replied the Kid slowly, "but——"

"I wish you'd stay. It's lonely—lonely as——"

"Oh, I'll stay then," the Kid agreed kindly.

Blund gave an audible sigh of relief. Again that odd light crept into the eyes of the Kid.

The outlaw did not speak to Blund until they arrived on the edge of the sagebrush and cacti-covered plain that stretched away to the east. He reached over and unknotted the blindfold.

"Night Hawk is about forty miles directly east," the outlaw said in a voice so changed that the detective looked up, startled. "But before you go I'm goin' to tell you something." The Kid spurred his horse up, and, leaning over, bent his somber gaze on the detective. "Blund," he said in a voice of deadly menace, "don't ever come West ag'in. An' now, you rotten-hearted —— —— —— you're not in my place now"—the Kid swept a hand toward the buttes in a gesture of haughty ownership—"an' if I ever hear of you lookin' fer me ag'in, I'll come where you are an' cram a live rattler down your dirty neck."

But the sublime and perfect insult was yet to come. The Kid reached over and returned to the detective his gun and belt. "Put them on," he commanded. The detective clumsily took them in his hands.

Then Mortimer Blund did a strange thing. He dropped the gun and belt to the ground, and, putting his hands over his face, sobbed like a great, overgrown boy.

When he looked up, the Kid was riding toward the buttes.

The detective and pseudo scientist looked about him helplessly. Then he turned his horse toward the east, the pack horse obediently following.

And recurrently, through that seemingly endless ride, the words of the smug general manager of the railroad company which had suffered at the hands of Kid Caldwell certain financial losses came to him and mocked him:

"Your reputation, Mr. Blund, is known to us; and I assure you that we feel you will be successful in running down Caldwell. He has many friends, and—I understand—certain great cattle interests frown upon any attempt made to capture him; but remember we are back of you and that it will be child's play for a man of your experience to put an end to the depredations of that outlaw." The general manager had then picked a flower from a bouquet in a vase on his desk and placed it in his buttonhole. "It will be a simple matter with you, Mr. Blund, a simple matter."

Did you read about "The Foolishness of Kid Caldwell?" If you didn't, better get the last Popular from your news dealer. Ask for the first May number.

A SHARK WITH A CUE

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SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

A beautiful heiress, Miss Challoner, is discovered dead in a swagger New York hotel. The police say it is suicide, but Detective Gryce and his clever young assistant, Sweetwater, decide that it is murder. They suspect a remarkable man named Brotherson, and he is arrested for examination by the coroner. Brotherson explains that he had asked Miss Challoner to marry him and that she had brusquely refused. He admits being in the hotel the night of her death. His explanations are so logical and appear so straightforward that the coroner finally discharges him for lack of any evidence to connect him with the affair. Sweetwater is not satisfied, however, and discovers that a woman was mysteriously murdered some few years before in an apartment that overlooked Brotherson's room in a Brooklyn tenement where he lived whenever working on his inventions. There he was known as Mr. Dunn. Detective Gryce prevails upon the police commissioner to allow young Sweetwater to handle the Challoner case. Sweetwater, disguised as a workman, secures a room adjoining Brotherson's in the Brooklyn tenement. He spends much time in watching, but fails to discover anything suspicious in any of Brotherson's actions or words. Brotherson finally tells Sweetwater that he has known all the time that the latter is a police officer, and the detective retires in chagrin. Meanwhile Gryce has a clew from Derby, Pennsylvania. Going there Sweetwater finds another man whose initials are O. B., *Oswald* Brotherson, superintendent of a big manufacturing plant and the idol of his employees. As Brotherson is critically ill with typhoid, the detective has to bide his time. Doris Scott, a lovely girl employed in the factory, a protégée of Oswald, and in whom Miss Challoner was interested, is acting as nurse. She is deeply in love with Oswald, who is entirely unconscious of the fact. She and Sweetwater and old Mr. Challoner, who has come down to Derby, decide that Doris must be the one to break the news of Miss Challoner's death to Oswald, who was engaged to be married to the beautiful heiress. Before this is done Orlando arrives, to every one's consternation. He insists that he be allowed to be present when the terrible news is broken to Oswald. At last the patient is sufficiently recovered to stand the shock, and Doris tells him the facts. She also mentions Orlando's mad infatuation for Miss Challoner and his threatening letter to her. Doris stops suddenly as she hears Orlando enter.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ALONE.

OSWALD had heard nothing, seen nothing. But he took note of Doris' silence, and turning toward her in frenzy saw what had happened, and so was in a measure prepared for the stern, short sentence which now rang through the room:

"Wait, Miss Scott! You tell the story badly. Let him listen to me. From my mouth only shall he hear the stern and seemingly unnatural part I played in this family tragedy."

The face of Oswald hardened. Those pliant features—beloved for their gracious kindliness—set themselves in lines which altered them almost past recognition; but his voice was not without some of its natural sweetness, as after a long and hollow look at the other's composed countenance, he said abruptly:

"Speak! I am bound to listen. You are my brother."

Orlando turned toward Doris. She was slipping away.

"Don't go," said he.

But she was gone.

Slowly he turned back.

Oswald raised his hand, and checked the words with which he would have begun his story.

"Never mind the beginning," said he. "Doris has told all that. You saw Miss Challoner in Lenox—admired her—offered yourself to her, and afterward wrote her a threatening letter because she rejected you."

"It is true. Other men have followed just such unworthy impulses—and been ashamed and sorry afterward. I was sorry and I was ashamed, and as

This story began in the March Month-end POPULAR. Back numbers can be obtained through any news dealer.

soon as my first anger was over went to tell her so. But she mistook my purpose, and——"

"And what?"

Orlando hesitated. Even his iron nature trembled before the misery he saw—a misery he was destined to augment rather than soothe. With pains altogether out of keeping with his character, he sought in the recesses of his darkened mind for words less bitter and less abrupt than those which sprang involuntarily to his lips. But he did not find them. Though he pitied his brother, and wished to show that he did, nothing but the stern language suitable to the stern fact he wished to impart would leave his lips.

"And ended the pitiful struggle of the moment with one quick, unpremeditated blow," was what he said. "There is no other explanation possible for the act, Oswald. Bitter as it is for me to acknowledge it, I am thus far guilty of this beloved woman's death. But, as God hears me, from the moment I first saw her, to the moment I saw her last, I did not know, nor did I for a moment dream, that she was anything to you or to any other man of my stamp and station. I thought she despised my country birth, my mechanical attempts, my lack of aristocratic pretensions and traditions."

"Edith?"

"Now that I know she had other reasons for her contempt—that the words she wrote were in rebuke to the brother rather than to the man, I feel my guilt and deplore my anger. I cannot say more. I should but insult your grief by any lengthy expressions of regret and sorrow."

A groan of intolerable anguish from the sick man's lips, and then the quick thrust of his reawakened intelligence rising superior to the overthrow of all his hopes.

"For a woman of Edith's principle to seek death in a moment of desperation, the provocation must have been very great. Tell me if I'm to hate you through life—yea, through all eternity—or if I must seek in some unimaginable failure of my own character or conduct the cause of her intolerable despair."

"Oswald!" The tone was controlling, and yet that of one strong man to another. "Is it for us to read the heart of any woman, least of all of a woman of her susceptibilities and keen inner life? The wish to end all comes to some natures like a lightning flash from a clear sky. It comes, it goes, often without leaving a sign. But if a weapon chances to be near—here it was in hand—then death follows the impulse which, given an instant of thought, would have vanished in a back sweep of other emotions. Chance was the real accessory to this death by suicide. Oswald, let us realize it as such, and accept our sorrow as a mutual burden, and turn to what remains to us of life and labor. Work is grief's only consolation. Then let us work."

But of all this Oswald had caught but one word.

"Chance?" he repeated. "Orlando, I believe in God."

"Then seek your comfort there. I find it in harnessing the winds; in forcing the powers of nature to do my bidding."

The other did not speak, and the silence grew heavy. It was broken by a cry from Oswald.

"No more," said he, "no more." Then, in a yearning accent: "Send Doris to me."

Orlando started. This name coming so close upon that word "comfort" produced a strange effect upon him. But another look at Oswald, and he was ready to do his bidding. The bitter ordeal was over; let him have his solace if it was in her power to give it to him.

Orlando, upon leaving his brother's room, did not stop to deliver that brother's message directly to Doris, he left this for Truda to do, and retired immediately to his hangar in the woods.

Locking himself in, he slightly raised the roof, and then sat down before the car which was rapidly taking on shape and assuming that individuality and appearance of sentient life which hitherto he had only seen in dreams. But his eye, which had never failed to kindle at

this sight before, shone dully in the semi-gloom. The air car could wait; he would have his hour first in this solitude of his own making. The gaze he dreaded, the words from which he shrank, could not penetrate here.

Guarded by these walls; shut from the eye of heaven, or almost shut, there were none on earth and none in heaven, as he thought, to heed his sufferings or take account of his sins. He could shout aloud her name, he could fill the space about with that of Edith even, resurrected but now from a past on which he had set such a stone he had never expected to see it lifted again, and only these windowless walls would respond. He was alone with his past, his present, and his future.

He needed to be. The strongest must pause when the precipice yawns before him. The gulf can be spanned; he feels himself forceful enough for that; but his eyes must take their measurement of it first; he must know its depths and possible dangers. Only a fool would ignore these steeps of jagged rock; and he was no fool, only a man to whom the unexpected had happened, a man who had seen his way clear to the horizon, and then had come up against *this!* Love, when he thought such folly dead! Remorse, when glory called for the quiet mind and heart!

He recognized its mordant fang, and knew that its ravages, though only just begun, would last his lifetime. Nothing could stop them now, nothing, nothing. And he laughed, as the thought went home; laughed at the irony of fate, and its inexorableness; laughed at his own defeat and his nearness to a barred paradise.

Oswald loved Edith, loved her yet, with a flame time would take long to quench. Doris loved Oswald, and he Doris; and not one of them would ever attain the delights each was so fitted to enjoy. Why shouldn't he laugh? What is left to man but mockery when all props fall? Disapppointment was the universal lot; and it should go merrily with him if he must take his turn at it.

But here the strong spirit of the man reasserted itself; it should be but a turn. A man's joys are not bounded by his loves or even by the satisfaction of a perfectly untrammeled mind. Performance makes a world of its own for the capable and the strong, and this was still left to him. He, Orlando Brotherson, despair while his great work lay unfinished! That would be to lay stress on the inevitable pains and fears of commonplace humanity. He was not of that ilk. Intellect was his god; ambition his motive power. What would this casual blight upon his supreme contentment be to him, when, with the wings of his air car spread, he should spurn the earth and soar into the heaven of fame simultaneously with his flight into the open?

He could wait for that hour. He had measured the gulf before him, and found it passable. Henceforth no looking back.

Rising, he stood for a moment gazing, with an alert eye now, upon such sections of his car as had not yet been fitted into their places; then he bent forward to his work, and soon the lips which had uttered that sardonic laugh a few minutes before, parted in gentler fashion, and song took the place of curses—a ballad of love and fondest truth. But Orlando never knew what he sang. He had the gift, and used it.

Would his tones, however, have rung out with quite so mellow a sweetness had he seen the restless figure even then circling his retreat with eyes darting accusation, and arms lifted toward him in wild but impotent threat?

Yes, I think they would; for he knew that the man who thus expressed his helplessness along with his convictions, was no nearer the end he had set himself to attain than on the day he first betrayed his suspicions.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE HUT CHANGES ITS NAME.

That night Oswald was taken very ill. For three days his life hung in the balance, then youth and healthy living triumphed over shock and bereavement, and he came slowly back to his sad and crippled existence.

He had been conscious of his surroundings, and probably of his bitter sorrows for some few days, when one morning he asked Doris whose face it was he had seen bending over him so often during the last week. "Have you a new doctor? A man with white hair and a comforting smile? Or have I dreamed this face? I have had so many fancies, this might easily be one of them."

"No, it is not a fancy," was the quiet reply. "Nor is it the face of a doctor. It is that of a friend. One whose heart is bound up in your recovery; one for whom you must live, Mr. Brotherson."

"I don't know him, Doris. It's a strange face to me. And yet, it's not altogether strange. Who is this man, and why should he care for me so deeply?"

"Because you share one love and one grief. It is Edith's father whom you see at your bedside. He has helped to nurse you ever since you came down this second time."

"Edith's father! Doris, it cannot be. *Edith's father!*"

"Yes, Mr. Challoner has been in Derby for the last two weeks. He has only one interest now; to see you well again."

"Why?"

Doris caught the note of pain, if not suspicion, in this query, and smiled as she asked in turn:

"Shall he answer that question himself? He is waiting to come in. Not to talk. You need not fear his talking. He's as quiet as any man I ever saw."

The sick man closed his eyes, and Doris, watching, saw the flush rise to his emaciated cheek, then slowly fade away again to a pallor that frightened her. Had she injured where she would heal? Had she pressed too suddenly and too hard on the ever-gaping wound in her invalid's breast. She gasped in terror at the thought, then she faintly smiled, for his eyes had opened again, and showed a calm determination, as he said:

"I should like to see him. I should like him to answer the question I have just put you. I should rest easier, and get well faster—or not get well at all."

This latter he half whispered, and Doris, tripping from the room, may not have heard it, for her face showed no further shadow as she ushered in Mr. Challoner, and closed the door behind him. She had looked forward to this moment for days.

To Oswald, however, it was an unexpected excitement, and his voice trembled with something more than physical weakness as he greeted his visitor, and thanked him for his attentions.

"Doris says that you have shown me the kindness from the desire you have to see me well again, Mr. Challoner. Is this true?"

"Very true. I cannot emphasize the fact too strongly."

Oswald's eyes met his again, this time with great earnestness.

"You must have serious reasons for feeling so—reasons which I do not quite understand. May I ask why you place such value upon a life which, if ever useful to itself or others, has lost, and lost forever, the one delight which gave it meaning?"

It was for Mr. Challoner's voice to tremble now, as, reaching out his hand, he declared, with unmistakable feeling:

"I have no son. I have no interest left in life, outside this room, and the possibilities it contains for me. Your attachment to my daughter has created a bond between us, Mr. Brotherson, which I sincerely hope you will recognize as truly as I do."

Startled and deeply moved, the young man stretched out a shaking hand toward his visitor, with the feeble but exulting cry:

"Then you do not blame me for her wretched and mysterious death. You hold me guiltless of the misery which nerved her despairing arm?"

"Quite guiltless."

Oswald's wan and pinched features took on a beautiful expression, and Mr. Challoner no longer wondered at his daughter's choice.

"Thank God!" fell from the sick man's lips, and then there was a silence during which their hands met.

It was some minutes before either

spoke, and then it was Oswald who said:

"I must confide to you certain facts. I honored your daughter, and realized her position fully. Our plight was never made in words, nor should I have presumed to advance any claim to her hand if I had not made good my expectations, Mr. Challoner. I meant to win both her regard and yours by acts, not words. I felt that I had a great deal to do, and I was prepared to work and wait. I loved her——" He turned away his head, and the silence which filled up the gap united those two hearts, as the old and young are seldom united.

But when a little later, Mr. Challoner rejoined Doris, in her little sitting room, he, nevertheless, showed a perplexity she had hoped to see removed by this understanding with the younger Brotherson.

The cause became apparent as soon as he spoke.

"These brothers hold by each other," said he. "Oswald will hear nothing against Orlando. He says that he has redeemed his fault. He does not even protest that his brother's word is to be believed in this matter. He does not seem to think that necessary. He evidently regards Orlando's personality as speaking as truly and satisfactorily for itself, as his own does. And I dared not undeceive him."

"He does not know all our reasons for distrust. He has heard nothing about the poor washerwoman."

"No, and he must not—not for weeks. He has borne all that he can."

"His confidence in his older brother is sublime. I do not share it; but I cannot help but respect him for it."

It was warmly said, and Mr. Challoner could not forbear casting an anxious look at her upturned face. What he saw there made him turn away with a sigh.

"This confidence has for me a very unhappy side," he remarked. "It shows me Oswald's thought. He who loved her best accepts the cruel verdict of an unreasoning public."

Doris' large eyes burned with a weird light upon his face.

"He has not had my dream," she murmured, with all the quiet of an unmoved conviction.

Yet as the days went by even her manner changed toward the busy inventor. It was hardly possible for it not to. The high stand he took; the regard accorded him on every side; his talent; his conversation, which was an education in itself, and, above all, his absorption in a work daily advancing toward completion, removed him so insensibly, and yet so decidedly, from the hideous past of tragedy with which his name, if not his honor, was associated, that, unconsciously to herself, she gradually lost her icy air of repulsion and lent him a more or less attentive ear, when he chose to join their small company of an evening.

The result was that he turned so bright a side upon her that toleration merged from day to day into admiration, and memory lost itself in anticipation of the event which was to prove him a man of men, if not one of the world's greatest mechanical geniuses.

Meanwhile, Oswald was steadily improving in health, if not in spirits. He had taken his first walk without any unfavorable results, and Orlando decided from this that the time had come for an explanation of his device, and his requirements in regard to it. Seated together in Oswald's room, he broached the subject thus:

"Oswald, what is your idea about what I'm making up there?"

"That it will be a success."

"I know; but its character, its use? What do you think it is?"

"I've an idea; but my idea doesn't fit the conditions."

"How's that?"

"The shed is too closely hemmed in. You haven't room——"

"For what?"

"To start an aëroplane."

"Yet it is certainly a device for flying."

"I supposed so; but——"

"It is an air car with a new and valuable idea—the idea for which the whole world has been seeking ever since the first aëroplane found its way

up from the earth. My car needs no room to start in save that which it occupies. If it did, it would be but the modification of a hundred others."

"Orlando!"

As Oswald thus gave expression to his surprise, their two faces were a study. The fire of genius in the one; the light of sympathetic understanding in the other.

"If this car, now within three days of its completion," Orlando proceeded, "does not rise from the oval of my hangar like a bird from its nest, and, after a wide and circling flight, descend again into the selfsame spot without any swerving from its direct course, then have I failed in my endeavor, and must take a back seat with the rest. But it will not fail. I'm certain of success, Oswald. All I want just now is a sympathetic helper—you, for instance; some one who will aid me with the final fittings, and hold his peace to all eternity if the impossible occurs, and the thing proves a failure."

"Have you such pride as that?"

"Exactly as much as that."

"So much that you cannot face failure?"

"Not when attached to my name. You can see how I feel about that by the secrecy I have worked under. No other person knows what I have just communicated to you. Every part shipped here came from different manufacturing firms; sometimes a part of a part was all I allowed to be made in any one place. My fame, like my ship, must rise with one bound into the air, or it must never rise at all. I was not made for petty accomplishment, or the slow plodding of commonplace minds. I must startle, or remain obscure. That is why I chose this place for my venture, and you for my helper and associate."

"You want me to ascend with you?"

"I certainly do."

"At the end of three days?"

"Yes."

"Orlando, I cannot."

"You cannot? Not strong enough yet? I'll wait then—three days more."

"The time's too short. A month is scarce sufficient. It would be folly, such as you never show, to trust a nerve so undermined as mine till time has restored its power. For an enterprise like this, you need a man of ready strength and resources; not one whose condition you might be obliged to consider at a very critical moment."

Orlando, balked thus at the outset, showed his displeasure.

"You do not do justice to your will. It is strong enough to carry you through anything."

"It was."

"You can force it to act for you."

"I fear not, Orlando."

"I counted on you, and you thwart me at the most critical moment of my life."

Oswald smiled; his whole candid and generous nature bursting into view, in one quick flash.

"Perhaps," he assented; "but you will thank me when you realize my weakness. Another man must be found—quick, deft, secret, yet honorably alive to the importance of the occasion and your rights as a great, original thinker and mechanician."

"Do you know such a man?"

"I don't; but there must be many such among our workmen."

"There isn't one; and I haven't time to send to Brooklyn. I reckoned on you."

"Can you wait a month?"

"No."

"A fortnight, then?"

"No, not ten days."

Oswald looked surprised. He would have liked to ask why such precipitation was necessary, but the tone in which this ultimatum was given was of that decisive character which admits of no argument. He, therefore, merely looked his query.

But Orlando was not one to answer looks; besides, he had no reply for the same importunate question urged by his own good sense. He knew that he must make the attempt upon which his future rested soon and without risk of the sapping influence of lengthened suspense and weeks of waiting. He could hold on those two demons leagued in attack against him, for a definite seven days,

but not for an indeterminate time. If he were to be saved from folly—from himself—events must rush.

He, therefore, repeated his *"no,"* with increased vehemence, adding, as he marked the reproach in his brother's eye: "I cannot wait. The test must be made on Saturday evening next, whatever the conditions; whatever the weather. An air car to be serviceable must be ready to meet the lightning and tempest, and, what is worse, perhaps, an insufficient crew." Then rising, he exclaimed, with a determination which rendered him majestic: *"If help is not forthcoming, I'll do it all myself.* Nothing shall hold me back; nothing shall stop me; and when you see me and my car rise above the treetops, you'll feel that I have done what I could to make you forget——"

He did not need to continue. Oswald understood, and flashed a grateful look his way before saying:

"You will make the attempt at night?"

"Certainly."

"And on Saturday?"

"I've said it."

"I will run over in my mind the qualifications of such men as I know and acquaint you with the result to-morrow."

"There are adjustments to be made. A man of accuracy is necessary."

"I will remember."

"And he must be likable. I can do nothing with a man with whom I'm not perfectly in accord."

"I understand that."

"Good night, then." A moment of hesitancy, then: "I wish not only yourself, but Miss Scott to be present at this test. Prepare her for the spectacle; but not yet, not till within an hour or two of the occasion."

And with a proud smile, in which flashed a significance which startled Oswald, he gave a hurried nod, and turned away.

When, an hour afterward, Doris looked in through the open door, she found Oswald sitting with face buried in his hands, thinking so deeply that he did not hear her. He had sat like this, immovable and absorbed, ever since his brother had left him.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

SILENCE—AND A KNOCK.

Oswald did not succeed in finding a man to please Orlando. He suggested one person after another to the exacting inventor, but none was satisfactory to him, and each, in turn, was turned down. It is not every one we want to have share a world-wide triumph or an ignominious defeat. And the days were passing.

He had said in a moment of elation, *"I will do it alone;"* but he knew even then that he could not. Two hands were necessary to start the car; afterward, he might manage it alone. Descent was even possible, but to give the contrivance its first lift required a second mechanician. Where was he to find one to please him? And what was he to do if he did not? Conquer his prejudices against such men as he had seen, or delay the attempt, as Oswald had suggested, till he could get one of his old cronies on from New York? He could do neither. The obstinacy of his nature was such as to offer an invincible barrier against either suggestion.

An alternative remained. He had heard of women aviators. If Doris could be induced to accompany him into the air, instead of clinging sodden like to the weight of Oswald's woe, then would the world behold a triumph which would dwarf the ecstasy of the bird's flight and rob the eagle of his kingly pride. But Doris barely endured him, as yet, and the thought was not one to be considered for a moment. Yet what other course remained?

He was brooding deeply on the subject, in his hangar one evening—it was Thursday, and Saturday was but two days off—when there came a light knock on the door.

This had never occurred before. He had given strict orders, backed by his brother's authority, that he was never to be intruded upon when in this place; and, though he had sometimes encountered the prying eyes of the curious

flashing from behind the trees encircling the hangar, his door had never been approached till now, or his privacy encroached upon.

He started; then, when this low but penetrating sound struck across the turmoil of his thoughts, he cast one look in the direction from which it came, but he did not rise, or even change his position on his workman's stool.

Then it came again, still low but with an insistence which drew his brows together, and made his hand fall from the wire he had been unconsciously holding through the mental debate which was absorbing him.

Still he made no response, and the knocking continued. Should he ignore it entirely, start up his motor, and render himself oblivious to all other sounds?

At every other point in his career, he would have done this, but an unknown and, as yet, unnamed something had entered his heart during this fatal month, which made old ways impossible and oblivion a thing he dared not court too recklessly. Should this be a summons from Doris? Should—inconceivable idea, yet it seized upon him relentlessly, and would not yield for the asking—should it be Doris herself!

Taking advantage of a momentary cessation of the ceaseless tap-tap, he listened. Silence was never profounder than in this forest on that windless night. Earth and air seemed, to his strained ear, emptied of all sound. The clatter of his own steady, unhastened heart beat was all that broke upon the stillness. He might be alone in the universe for all token of life beyond these walls, or, so he was saying to himself, when sharp, quick, sinister, the knocking recommenced, demanding admission, insisting upon attention, drawing him against his own will to his feet, and finally, though he made more than one stand against it, to the very door.

"Who's there?" he asked imperiously, and with some show of anger.

No answer, but another quiet knock.

"Speak, or go from my door. No one has the right to intrude here. What is your name and business?"

Continued knocking—nothing more.

With an outburst of wrath, which made the hangar ring, Orlando lifted his fist to answer this appeal in his own fierce fashion from his own side of the door, but the impulse paused at fulfillment, and he let his arm fall again in a rush of self-hatred which would have pained his worst enemy, even little Doris, to witness. As it reached his side, the knock came again.

It was too much. With an oath, Orlando reached for his key. But, before fitting it into the lock, he cast a look behind him. The car was in plain sight, filling the central space from floor to roof. A single glance from a stranger's eye, and its principal secret would be a secret no longer. He must not run such a risk. Before he answered this call, he must drop the curtain he had rigged up against such emergencies as these. He had but to pull a cord, and a veil would fall before his treasure, concealing it as effectually as an Eastern bride is concealed behind her yashmak.

Stepping to the wall, he drew that cord; then, with an impatient sigh, returned to the door.

Another quiet but insistent knock greeted him.

In no fury now, but with a vague sense of portent which gave an aspect of farewell to the one quick glance he cast about the well-known spot, he fitted the key in the lock, and stood ready to turn it.

"I ask again your name and your business," he shouted out, in loud command. "Tell them or——" He meant to say, "or I do not turn this key." But something withheld the threat. He knew that it would perish in the utterance; that he could not carry it out. He would have to open the door now, response or no response. "Speak!" was the word with which he finished his demand.

A final knock.

Pulling a pistol from his pocket, with his left hand, he turned the key with his right.

The door remained unopened.

Stepping slowly back, he stared at its unpainted boards for a moment, then he spoke up quietly, almost courteously.

"Enter!"

But the command passed unheeded; the latch was not raised, and only the slightest tap was heard.

With a bound, he reached forward and pulled the door open. Then a great silence fell upon him, and a rigidity as of the grave seized and stiffened his powerful frame.

The man confronting him from the darkness was Sweetwater.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE MAN WITHIN AND THE MAN WITHOUT.

An instant of silence, during which the two men eyed each other; then, Sweetwater, with an ironical smile directed toward the pistol, lightly remarked:

"Mr. Challoner and other men at the hotel are acquainted with my purpose, and await my return. I have come"—here he cast a glowing look at the huge curtain cutting off the greater portion of the illy lit interior—"to offer you my services, Mr. Brotherson. I have no other motive for this intrusion than to be of use. I am deeply interested in your invention, to the development of which I have already lent some aid, and can bring to the test you propose a sympathetic help which you could hardly find in any other person living."

The silence which settled down at the completion of these words had a weight which made that of the previous moment seem light and all athrob with sound. The man within had not yet caught his breath; the man without held his, in an anxiety which had little to do with the direction of the weapon, into which he looked. Then an owl hooted far away in the forest, and Orlando, slowly lowering his arm, asked in an oddly constrained tone:

"How long have you been in town?"

The answer cut clean through any lingering hope he may have had.

"Ever since the day your brother was told the story of his great misfortune."

"Ah! Still at your old tricks! I thought you had quit that business as unprofitable."

"I don't know. I never expect quick returns. He who holds on for a rise sometimes reaps unlooked-for profits."

The arm and fist of Orlando Brotherson ached to hurl this fellow back into the heart of the midnight woods.

But they remained quiet, and he spoke instead:

"I have buried the business. You will never resuscitate it through me."

Sweetwater smiled. There was no mirth in his smile, though there was lightness in his tone, as he said:

"Then let us go back to the matter in hand. You need a helper; where are you going to find one if you don't take me?"

A growl from Brotherson's set lips. Never had he looked more dangerous than in the one burning instant following this daring repetition of the detective's outrageous request. But, as he noted how slight was the figure opposing him from the other side of the threshold, he was swayed by his natural admiration of pluck in the physically weak, and lost his threatening attitude, only to assume one which Sweetwater secretly found it even harder to meet.

"You are a fool," was the stinging remark he heard flung at him. "Do you want to play the police officer here, and arrest me in mid-air?"

"Mr. Brotherson, you understand me as little as I am supposed to understand you. Humble as my place is in society and, I may add, in the department whose interests I serve, there is in me two men. One you know passably well—the detective of methods, indifferently clever, and with very much to learn. Of the other—the workman used to hammer and saw, but not without some knowledge, too, of higher mathematics and the principles upon which great mechanical inventions depend, you know little, and must imagine much. I was playing the gawky when I helped you in the old house in Brooklyn. I was interested in your airship—oh, I recognized it for what it was, odd as its shape was and lacking as it then did all ostensible means for flying; but I was

not caught in the whirl of its idea—the idea by which you doubtless expect, and with very good reason, too, to revolutionize the science of aviation. But I've been thinking it over since, and I see it all, and am so filled with your own hopes that either I must have a hand in the finishing and sailing of the one you have yourself constructed, or go to work myself on the hints you have unconsciously given me, and make a car of my own."

Audacity often wins out where lesser means fail. Orlando, with a curious twist of his strong lip, took hold of the detective's arm, and drew him in, shutting and locking the door carefully behind him.

"Now," said he, "you shall tell me what you think you have discovered, to make any ideas of your own available in the manufacture of a superior self-propelling airship."

Sweetwater, who had been so violently wheeled about in entering that he stood with his back to the curtain concealing the car, answered without hesitation:

"You have a device, entirely new so far as I can judge, by which this car can leap at once into space, hold its own in any direction, and alight again upon any given spot without shock to the machine or danger to the people controlling it."

"Explain the device."

"I will draw it."

"You can?"

"As I see it."

"As *you* see it!"

"Yes. It's a brilliant idea; I could never have conceived it."

"You believe——"

"I know."

"Sit here. Let's *see* what you know."

Sweetwater sat down at the table the other pointed out, and, drawing forward a piece of paper, took up a pencil with an easy air. Brotherson approached, and stood at his shoulder. He had taken up his pistol again, why he hardly knew, and, as Sweetwater began his marks, his fingers tightened on the butt till they turned white in the murky lamplight.

"You see," came in easy tones from the stooping draftsman, "I have an imagination which only needs a slight fillip from a mind like yours to send it in the desired direction. I shall not draw an exact reproduction of your idea, but I think you will see that I understand it very well. How's that for a start?"

Brotherson looked, and hastily drew back. He did not want the other to note his surprise.

"But that is a portion you never saw," he loudly declared.

"No, but I saw this," returned Sweetwater, working busily on some curves; "and these gave me the fillip I mentioned. The rest came easily."

Brotherson, in dread of his own anger, threw his pistol to the other end of the shed.

"You knave! You thief!" he furiously cried.

"How so?" asked Sweetwater smilingly, rising and looking him calmly in the face. "A thief is one who appropriates another man's goods, or, let us say, another man's ideas. I have appropriated nothing—yet. I've only shown you how easily I could do so. Mr. Brotherson, take me in as your assistant. I will be faithful to you, I swear it. I want to see that machine go up."

"For how many people have you drawn those lines?" thundered the inexorable voice.

"For nobody; not for myself even. This is the first time they have left their hiding place in my brain."

"Can you swear to that?"

"I can and will, if you require it. But you ought to believe my word, sir. I am square as a die in all matters not connected—well, not connected with my profession," he smiled in a burst of that whimsical humor, which not even the seriousness of the moment could quite suppress.

"And what surety have I that you do not consider this very matter of mine as coming within the bounds you speak of?"

"None. But you must trust me that far."

Brotherson surveyed him with an irony which conveyed a very different message to the detective than any he had intended. Then quickly:

"To how many have you spoken, dilating upon this device, and publishing abroad my secret?"

"I have spoken to no one, not even to Mr. Gryce. That shows my honesty as nothing else can."

"You have kept my secret intact."

"Entirely so, sir."

"So that no one, here or elsewhere, shares our knowledge of the new points in this mechanism?"

"I say so, sir."

"Then if I should kill you," came in ferocious accents, "now—here——"

"You would be the *only* one to own that knowledge. But you won't kill me."

"Why?"

"Need I go into reasons?"

"Why, I say?"

"Because your conscience is already too heavily laden to bear the burden of another unprovoked crime."

Brotherson, like a man struck full in the face, started back, glaring with open ferocity upon the man who dared to face him with such an accusation.

"God! Why didn't I shoot you on entrance?" he cried. "Your courage is certainly colossal."

A fine smile, without even the hint of humor now, touched the daring detective's lips. Brotherson's anger seemed to grow under it, and he loudly repeated:

"It's more than colossal; it's abnormal and"—a moment's pause, then with ironic pauses—"and quite unnecessary save as a matter of display, unless you think you need it to sustain you through the ordeal you are courting. You wish to help me finish and prepare for flight?"

"I sincerely do."

"You consider yourself competent?"

"I do."

Brotherson's eyes fell, and he walked once to the extremity of the oval flooring and back.

"Well, we will grant that. But that's not all that is necessary. My requirements demand a companion in my first flight. Will you go up in the car with me on Saturday night?"

A quick affirmative was on Sweetwater's lips, but the glimpse which he got of the speaker's face glowering upon him from the shadows into which Brotherson had withdraw stopped its utterance, and the silence grew heavy. Though it may not have lasted long by the clock, the instant of breathless contemplation of each other's features across the intervening space was of incalculable moment to Sweetwater, and, possibly, to Brotherson. As drowning men are said to live over their whole history between their first plunge and their final rise to light and air, so through the mind of the detective rushed the memories of his past and the fast-fading glories of his future. He saw in instantaneous vision the wan, bent figure of his mother mourning in her little cottage by the seashore—the still feebler one of Mr. Gryce looking vainly about for the arm on which he had come to lean—the bowed head of Mr. Challoner alone with his unsolved doubts—Oswald—Doris, a woman to worship if one were but a worm at her feet—and rebelling at the subtle peril he saw in that sardonic eye, he vociferated an impulsive:

"No! I'll not——" and paused, caught by a new and irresistible sensation.

A breath of wind—the first he had felt that night—had swept in through some crevice in the curving wall, flapping the canvas enveloping the great car. It acted like a peal to battle. After all, a man must take some risks in his life, and his heart was in this trial of a redoubtable mechanism in which he had full faith. He could not say no to the prospect of being the first to share a triumph which would send his name to the ends of the earth; and, changing the trend of his sentence, he repeated with a calmness which had the force of a great decision:

"I will not fail you in anything. If it rises"—here his trembling finger rose toward the hidden mechanism—"it will take me with it, so that when it de-

scends I may be the first to congratulate the proud inventor of such a marvel."

"So be it!" shot from the other's lips, his eyes losing their threatening look, and his whole countenance suddenly aglow with the enthusiasm of awakened genius.

Coming from the shadows, he laid his hand on the cord regulating the rise and fall of the concealing curtain.

"Here it is!" he cried, and drew the cord.

The canvas shook, gathered itself into great folds, and disappeared in the shadows from which he had just stepped.

The air car stood revealed—a startling, because wholly unique, vision.

Long did Sweetwater survey it, then turning with beaming face upon the watchful inventor, he uttered a loud "Hurrah!"

Next moment, with everything forgotten between them save the glories of this invention, both dropped simultaneously to the floor, and began that minute examination of the mechanism necessary to their mutual work.

TO BE CONCLUDED.

The conclusion of this story will be published two weeks hence, in the first June POPULAR, on sale May 10th

DELIVERED AND PAID FOR

THE book agent approached respectfully the desk of James S. Sherman, the Vice President of the United States, saying:

"This set of books is for you, free of charge. There are a few celebrated men to whom we wish to give a set, thus affording you pleasure and giving the books valuable advertisement. Please sign this receipt."

Mr. Sherman signed and smiled. The books were handsome.

Three months later another agent appeared, asking payment for the books

"But they were presented to me," objected the Vice President.

"In return for this receipt and promise to pay," explained the agent smoothly, producing the paper Sherman had signed.

The Vice President sighed, made out his check for the required amount, said something about being stung, and was about to hand the check over. On second thought, he drew it back, and wrote on it this indorsement:

This check is in full payment for a set of books which are not worth a darn, but the money is cheerfully paid in acknowledgment of the smooth way in which a gentlemanly book agent came it over your Uncle Jim.

A CONFESSION AND A COMMAND

DURING the last campaign preceding the congressional elections, Gus Karger, a newspaper writer with headquarters in Washington, met several of his friends in Chicago. He remarked that he had received no message that day from his assistant in the national capital, and expressed uneasiness as to whether the work in that city was being done properly.

"I think," he said, "I'll send him a telegram."

One of the friends said:

"I'll write it for you. Dictate it."

Karger dictated a batch of learned and weighty instructions, but this is the way the telegram was sent to the assistant:

I am drunk. No news here. Brahany is drunk. Get on to your job. Smith and Johnson are drunk. Cover Chicago situation from the White House. GUS KARGER.

The Ordinary Mr. Jones

By W. B. M. Ferguson

Author of "The Missing Blue Prints," "Garrison's Finish," Etc.

You can hardly blame the girls in Mr. Ferguson's story for scoffing at the pretensions of the quiet, inconspicuous, inoffensive-looking Mr. Jones who aspires to be an airman. They had heard of Billy Deneen, you see, and had formed the impression that aviators are not quivering, bashful mouse men. None the less is Jones bound skyward

HE was a most inoffensive-looking young man; quiet, inconspicuous, and retiring; baffling, too, in a measure, for it was difficult to judge his age or calling. A deep scar bisecting his prominent nose was the sole distinguishing mark amid—as Miss Dwyer put it—"a waste of commonplace features and characteristics." The term "ordinary" correctly defined him, and, it being Miss Dwyer's favorite expression, she employed it vigorously.

"A most ordinary young man by the ordinary name of Jones—John Jones, at that," she confided to her friend, Bessie Winslow. "I thought perhaps that such an exterior might conceal hidden wealths of fascination—it sometimes does, you know—but, alas! Mr. Jones—well, in his case appearances are not deceiving. I had a chat with him this morning before breakfast and his—well, he's just ordinary. Stereotyped thoughts and answers! A mental echo. Not an original idea in his head."

"Hard luck!" commented Bessie. "When Providence in its infinite wisdom and mercy finally deigns to send us a man, why doesn't it come across with the real goods? But Mr. John Jones will have to do, for I simply must flirt with something, Clara, even if it's only a scarecrow. I *must* keep my hand in, or when Harry comes back—if he ever will—I'll have completely forgotten my little book. Where is Mr. Jones from?"

"New York, I believe."

"Well, that's something," said Bessie piously. "He's neither a fossil nor a cabbage. Those two points are in his favor, and if he's so awfully ugly we can wear smoked glasses——"

"I didn't say he was ugly, Bessie, for he's not. But for that scar which hasn't entirely healed, he might be passably handsome. He's merely—well, just ordinary, both in mental processes and appearance. He might be a collar-button drummer or a ribbon salesman."

"Well, we must make the best of it," said Bessie practically. "After two months of *this,* I'm ready for anything."

Hampton, the small village in which Bessie Winslow and Clara Dwyer were temporarily residing with their respective fathers, was situate on the eastern shore of Long Island, not far distant from Montauk Point.

Doctor Dwyer, president emeritus of a noted university and, in his day, a celebrated entomologist, had for some time past devoted himself to the study of Long Island diptera, and had become so absorbed that he paid no heed to the passing summer. It was now early October, and he had signified no intention of returning cityward.

Neither had John Winslow, the professor's lifelong friend, who, having successfully retired from business, was devoting his remaining years to marine painting. Professor Dwyer and he were widowers, and this fact, with the addiditional one of their each possessing an

only child, had cemented their early friendship, and drawn them the more closely together.

Clara and Bessie were practically engaged, and their potential fiancés having been called abroad on business, Hampton was as good a place as any other in which to kill time against the return of Harry Harmon and Donald Graves, sole members of the successful and youthful firm of Harmon & Graves, manufacturers of, and dealers in, aëroplane supplies.

Yet Clara and Bessie owned the heritage of youth, and it was but natural that, after two months or so, Hampton should begin to pall upon them. The weekly letters from the firm of Harmon & Graves were the only diversions in an otherwise uneventful existence. Therefore, although their dialogue concerning Mr. Jones was purely in fun, it, perhaps, tends to show to what straits they were reduced.

The interest of Clara and Bessie would have flattered any normal young man, but Mr. John Jones was evidently abnormal. He was seemingly blind to every lure and bait, and, in the little boarding house run by Mrs. Casey, Mr. Jones had a table to himself. He bowed politely to the four occupants of the other table—there were no other boarders—and exchanged commonplaces on the weather, but beyond this he would not commit himself. In time, this behavior invested his "ordinary" qualities with a fictitious interest, and, on the third day, the girls decided to begin their campaign in earnest.

Fortune favored Bessie, for, by some lucky inspiration, she mentioned the subject of aëroplanes, and Mr. Jones, instead of bolting, after the usual post-breakfast comments on the weather, remained, and displayed a mild interest. Clara then hastened to the attack, and the elusive, "ordinary" person found himself the prey of two very pretty and charming girls. One remark led to another until the firm of Harmon & Graves was mentioned, whereupon it developed that Mr. Jones knew both these gentlemen.

"They make the best laminated twin screw propeller on the market," said he, with conviction, much to the delight of his audience. "And," he added, "they know their business from the ground up, for they're not half-bad aviators, you know——"

"Half bad?" echoed his audience, appalled at this criticism. "Well, I should say not! The idea!"

"I—er—didn't mean to be disparaging," said Mr. Jones hastily. "I meant that for amateurs not properly engaged in aviation, they show some talent. I —er—that is, are they friends of yours?"

"Very great friends, Mr. Jones," said Clara, bursting with indignation and resentment. "Very great friends, indeed!"

"Very, *very* great friends, Mr. Jones," added Bessie, with flashing eyes. "Very close friends, Mr. Jones."

Mr. Jones' steady, gray eyes began to twinkle, unobserved by his inflamed audience.

"Oh, I see," he murmured. "It's only natural you should rush to their defense. As I was saying, perhaps with incessant practice Mr. Harmon and Mr. Graves may improve with time, though I'm not at all certain about that; for, after all, aviators are born, not made—the really great ones, I mean. Still, I commend your friends for attempting to study the art before undertaking to manufacture supplies for the trade——"

"Thank you, Mr. Jones. Thank you," said Bessie, dropping a curtsy. "Your commendation is a boon. 'May improve with time.' Indeed!"

" 'Attempting to study the art,' " added Clara, aghast. "What impertinence! When both Harry and Donald have appeared at the Mineola meet! Indeed! May I ask, Mr. Jones, if you know *anything at all* concerning the subject you are attempting to discuss so freely?"

"Well, I've still much to learn, Miss Dwyer," he modestly confessed.

"I should think you have, and that's putting it very mildly!" retorted Bessie. "Do you happen to be aware of the fact that Messrs. Harmon and Graves were for some time pupils of Mr. Deneen himself?"

"And who is Mr. Deneen?" blandly inquired Mr. Jones.

His audience eyed each other in blank astonishment. As well inquire concerning the identity of Columbus or Julius Cæsar.

"What!" cried Clara, aghast. "You don't know of Mr. Deneen! Do you mean to say you never heard of the *Vulture*—the biplane that made the first non-stop run to Chicago? That has just broken the speed record between St. Louis and New York? Do you mean to say you never heard of Billy Deneen—as they call him? Oh, the very idea is ridiculous, preposterous, absurd!"

"Of course, I've learned of the *Vulture,* and her last exploit—if it's true—and now that you mention the name, I believe I *have* heard of Mr. Deneen. At least, I think so——"

"Oh, you think so?" said Bessie witheringly. "Well, at least that's something. Do you think you've heard he's the greatest aviator in the world? That he built the *Vulture* from guys to propellers; that he invented her lightweight, low-consumption, high-powered, eight-cylinder——"

"Halt!" exclaimed Mr. Jones. "Really you fire technicalities with the rapidity of a mountain howitzer. Give me time. Remember I'm not a very dear friend of Mr. Harmon—or is it Graves that——"

"Billy Deneen is the great I AM," chanted Bessie, without halt or break as if repeating a lesson. "The big noise, the acknowledged authority, the preeminent bird man, the supreme space annihilator—and a hundred similar titles, which you can read in the headlines of any newspaper or magazine."

"Whew! So many titles as that?" exclaimed Mr. Jones. "I should think Mr. Deneen would occasionally crawl away to some obscure place, and hide his head from the limelight. The perpetual glare must be blinding."

"Mr. Deneen justly glories in the world's acclaim," sniffed Bessie, in her best manner. "Aviators aren't quivering, bashful, mouse men. No, indeed! Their calling demands the aggressive virtues."

"Really? Then I'm afraid I'll never be a success," sighed Mr. Jones. "I loathe publicity and the 'aggressive virtues'—whatever they may be."

"*You* an aviator?" chorused his audience, with incredulity.

"I—I call myself that—in—in an experimental way, of course," admitted Mr. Jones, displaying embarrassment. "That's how I know your friends—they being in the supply business."

"I'm afraid you'll never be much of an aviator," said Clara, shaking her head.

"Oh, dear, no," added Bessie, with conviction. "I cannot imagine it at all. You're much too—well, lacking in the aggressive virtues. Pardon if I appear overfrank, but we know the subject so thoroughly and the qualifications that are demanded. Don't we, Clara?"

"Naturally," agreed her friend, with dignity. "We know everything about aviation. Everything."

"I wish I did," confessed Mr. Jones. "I'm always learning—or trying to learn. It seems to me the more you know, the more you need to know. You say you know Mr. Deneen?"

"Of course," said Clara. "And any one would recognize him by the pictures scattered broadcast."

"I wonder, then, if you could favor me with an introduction? If he is so famous and expert, I should meet him. He might be able to give me a few pointers."

"He might—for a few thousand dollars. And then he might not," said Clara. "It requires a good deal of influence—not speaking of money—to secure Mr. Deneen's consent to teach any one. You know what a difficult time Donald and Harry had," she added, turning to Bessie.

"Still I won't abandon hope. Perhaps you will intercede for me," suggested Mr. Jones, lifting his hat.

They watched his "ordinary" figure until it disappeared down the road. For Mr. Jones was an inveterate and vigorous walker, sometimes absenting himself the entire day.

"My! What an awful whopper you told! Saying we knew Billy Deneen!"

exclaimed Bessie, at length. "If there's one celebrity in this world I *would* like to know—from emperors to matinée idols—it's this same Billy Deneen."

"I know," murmured Clara, flushing vividly. "But I just couldn't help the whopper popping out, Bess. He's what you can call national property; like the Bunker Hill Monument or the White House. We know him far better than does Mr. Jones. Ugh. How that man grates on me! He's insufferable. A bundle of egotism and ignorance! The idea of his presuming to criticize Donald and Harry when he's only a mere beginner himself! 'Experimenter,' he calls it. I am determined to squelch him!"

"Yes, I have it in for him for that, too," said Bessie. "We must shatter that ego of his, for, with all his assumed diffidence, you can see he thinks he's just about *it*. But let's not talk about Mr. Jones. You know Harry and Donald are booked for next Saturday's boat, and——"

But this story is about Mr. Jones.

During the ensuing days if the girls did not succeed in "squelching" the gentleman, they, at least, learned what had brought him to Hampton; what occasioned his long absences from the house; and all this was a sop to their inquisitiveness.

It seemed that Mr. Jones, disliking publicity, had selected Hampton for its very obscurity and, under solemn pledge of strict secrecy, he confessed that he intended putting in practice his theories regarding the difficult art of aviation. Not only that, but he had actually brought with him a biplane, and it was safely housed in an improvised hangar —an abandoned barn which he had rented from a neighboring farmer who owned large tracts of uncultivated land.

"But how did you get the machine here without every one knowing?" asked his astonished and interested audience.

"Oh, easily enough," said Mr. Jones, waving his hand. "Just shipped by rail. When crated it might be anything from a grand piano to a mangle, you know The farmer from whom I rented the land thinks I'm a harmless crank, and leaves me strictly alone—that's stipulated in the lease. The place is surrounded with trees, and I take care not to fly above them, thus advertising my presence to distant farmers, or the like. I've been searching for just such a place for a long time, and I know you'll keep my secret. I've told you because you're so interested in aviation, and, knowing the art as you do, I thought you would like to try out my machine——"

"That's—that's very kind of you, I'm sure," said Clara hastily. In reality, she was in deadly fear of aëroplanes, and was sublimely ignorant of the subject. "But really we can't trouble you, Mr. Jones. You see the fact is we—er—that is—I mean——"

"We promised Harry—that is, Mr. Harmon and Mr. Graves, not to fly with any one but them," supplemented Bessie, coming to the rescue with brisk prevarications. Parenthetically, she owned the same state of fear and ignorance as Clara.

"But merely as passengers?" suggested Mr. Jones.

"No, not even as passengers," replied Bessie, with great fortitude. "You see, the verb 'to fly' covers everything—even ballast. We cannot break our promise, can we, Clara?"

"Most certainly not! Besides, Mr. Jones, as you are but in the experimental stage, aren't you tacitly asking us to risk our lives?"

"Not when you know everything concerning aviation," said Mr. Jones cheerfully. "I venture to hope you would be good enough to show me a few wrinkles. Won't you come over and inspect the machine? Give me your opinion of it? I value expert criticism."

Clara eyed him sharply, but he appeared entirely ingenuous.

"I do wish you wouldn't harp on that word 'expert,'" she said. "I never claimed we were experts. I merely said we knew everything about aviation that——"

"But we'll gladly look at your machine, Mr. Jones," interrupted Bessie, in some excitement. "I always wanted to

see one close—that is, I like to inspect them all," correcting herself in time.

But Mr. Jones was seemingly unaware of the slip.

The impromptu aviation field was situate some two miles inland—a large tract completely inclosed with thickly wooded ground. Much to the girls' surprise, they found the "abandoned barn" to be a group of buildings, one of which proved to be a veritable mechanic's shop, in charge of a black-browed, saturnine gentleman in overalls; a man of few words, who regarded the visitors with misgiving, if not actual hostility. Introduced as "Mr. Brown, who is kindly teaching me how to fly," this gentleman bobbed his head, and promptly retired indoors, while Mr. Jones piloted his visitors to an adjoining building which he termed a "hangar."

Even to a tyro, Mr. Jones' biplane would have been an impressive sight, evoking enthusiasm. Resting on its two pneumatic-tired wheels—drawn up at will—beneath the skids and flanked with pontoons automatically inflated and deflated, which enabled it to float upon the water like a gull, it stood a thing of grace and beauty.

"It appears a good machine," said Clara critically, her eyes hovering on the gigantic planes; the levers, motor, gasoline tank; the twin, two-bladed propellers—twelve feet from tip to tip—backing the operator's seat; the multiform taut guys that hummed like the G string of a banjo.

"But, of course, it's nothing like the *Vulture*," added Bessie. "The *Vulture*—well, *that's* a machine worth looking at. *That's* what you can really call a biplane. Still, this is not half bad, Mr. Jones—if it works."

Clara and Bessie, adhering with great fortitude to the mythical promise exacted by their potential fiancés; and evincing no desire to watch Mr. Jones' experiment—for who would be so foolish as to expose oneself to the vagaries of a biplane operated by unskilled hands?—the trio presently set out on their return journey to Hampton.

The walk skirted the high cliff, and here Fate, in the shape of a modest wild flower, at last exposed the humiliating flaw in Mr. Jones' character for which the Misses Dwyer and Winslow had been searching.

"Oh, it's a beauty!" exclaimed Clara, peering over the cliff. "Won't you get it for me, Mr. Jones?"

Mr. Jones, lying prostrate and cautiously projecting his head over the cliff, estimated the distance to the sea-washed rocks that lay fully two hundred feet beneath him. Midway in a waste of very precarious footing was the modest wildflower.

Mr. Jones sat up, and emphatically stated that he would *not* secure it for Miss Dwyer.

"I'd love to oblige you," he said, "but really I can't. There's a sheer drop of two hundred feet, and those rocks down there look awfully hard and stuck all over with sharp points. The footing is most precarious, to say the least, and there's a twenty-mile wind that promises to further develop. Excuse me. I've just remembered an important engagement."

"What! Are you actually afraid?" cried Clara, pouncing on the flaw.

"Afraid? Think of it!" echoed Bessie, likewise pouncing. "Why, Harry or Donald would have been down there and back by this time! *Any* man would. Why, I never thought you were a coward, Mr. Jones!"

"Well, I don't know that I am," said he, flushing slightly. "But I'd rather be a live coward than a dead fool. To me the possible gain isn't worthy of the risk. I dare say I might be able to accomplish the feat, but I don't intend trying it. If it was to save a life, gain some worthy end, promote science, or benefit humanity; that would be different. But a wildflower and a woman's whim, be she ever so charming—never! My life is too valuable to risk in that silly, foolhardy fashion——"

"Such a life is not worth the safeguarding!" said Clara witheringly. "It will never amount to anything. The first requisite of a man is to be a man; to have courage——"

"Oh, you're not serious," smiled Mr. Jones. "At heart you're the last person

to permit unnecessary risk of life. Of course, there are some fool women who send fool men to their deaths, but you are not that type nor am I——"

"Let us please drop the subject!" coldly interrupted Clara, while Bessie futilely strove for words. "The gist of the matter, Mr. Jones, is that you lack courage, argue as you may."

"And being an aviator, you know," supplemented Bessie, "we naturally thought you didn't possess the—the —well——"

"Yellow streak?" assisted Mr. Jones. "Ah, well, you've ruthlessly uncovered it——"

"You've disclosed it yourself, Mr. Jones," corrected Clara. "I don't wish to make you feel badly over it. Perhaps it's constitutional. Truthfully, though, and in the best spirit, you will never make a successful aviator. But perhaps you already know that."

And with this truth, Mr. Jones appeared properly impressed and depressed.

A promised northeaster, which had been turning up since the beginning of the week, burst into grand chorus on Saturday morning. This was two days' subsequent to the parade of Mr. Jones' "yellow streak," and since that occasion he had seen but little of Clara and Bessie, the aviation field claiming his entire attention.

"What he does there, I don't know," said Bessie, "for, of course, he would never have the nerve to try to fly in this weather we've been having. I think he's just ashamed, and is hiding his head."

"Very likely," said Clara. "I do hope he hasn't taken it to heart, for I didn't mean to hurt his feelings——"

"Why, Clara! You *did* mean to. We both did, and we jumped at the chance."

"I know that," said the other penitently, "and I feel as small and mean as a mouse. I didn't want that old flower at all, and, of course, I wouldn't have let him get it——"

"Neither would I; but, somehow, it made me all the madder when he refused, though any person with common sense would have acted as did he——"

"And every one can't be a hero," sighed Clara. "It is wrong and wicked to make fun of his constitutional misfortune. I was thinking supposing our words and attitude goaded Mr. Jones into doing something foolhardy—to vindicate his courage, as it were. It's possible, you know."

"We haven't been very decent to him; that's certain," said Bessie contritely. "And, really, he—he is very nice, even though we refuse to admit it. Suppose from now on we just show him how nice *we* can be?"

"Just what I was about to suggest!" said Clara heartily. "Let us be our real selves."

Had Mr. Jones but known of this resolution, and with what expectancy the makers thereof were awaiting the opportunity of putting it into effect, there is no doubt he would have hastened his return to Hampton, instead of spending the entire day at his little aviation field.

But supper time came around and Mr. Jones had not returned. The northeaster, steadily increasing in fury, had by now achieved the dignity of "the worst storm we've had here in years."

The inmates of Mrs. Casey's boarding house were discussing the absence of Mr. Jones, and were wondering if it were advisable to send some one in search of him, when the dull crash of cannon, borne by the east wind and triumphing over the roar of the storm, brought them to their feet with questioning eyes, all thought of Mr. Jones temporarily banished.

"That's a ship in distress!" said Professor Dwyer, the first to speak. "They say this is a very dangerous coast, and that the bleaching bones of many a craft——"

Here Mrs. Casey, red of eye and tremulous of voice, rushed in with the information that a ship had struck on the outer bar, and was sending up blue lights.

"And Gawd help them!" she cried, wringing her hands. "I've felt it in my bones. 'Twas on just such a night I

lost my Terence. No boat can live in such a sea, but they'll try it. Oh, yes, they'll try it, for it's paid they are to play with death——"

"And also it's their honor and glory," gently added the professor.

Throwing on waterproofs and hats, he and his companions hurried forth, joining the crowd of Hampton folks streaming beachward, where the life-saving crew, already reënforced by the Bow Head station, were heroically at work.

The torrential rain had ceased, and a fugitive moon was even essaying to assert its presence, but the gale from the east had not abated, and the great combers thundered high upon the beach, lashing themselves to frothing fury as they impotently smashed their way among the rocks, only to be hurled back again, and yet again.

Perhaps half a mile offshore lay the victim of the sea, which, as the search-light from the Point blazed out, her gold-white arrow cutting a wide swath through the night as it unerringly reached its mark, it could be seen was fairly trapped on the outer bar. A steamer of perhaps some twelve thousand tons displacement, she had settled by the bow and, under pressure of wind and tide, was listing to starboard; to such degree, in fact, that her lee rail was in a welter of foam.

"Oh, this is awful!" cried Bessie, with blanched face. "Look at those waves! I've always wanted to see a shipwreck, not—not knowing it could be like this!"

"She's lost unless they can get a line to her," said Mr. Winslow, who, as a marine painter, rather prided himself on his knowledge of matters nautical. "Perhaps she lost her bearings in the fog—it lifted but half an hour ago. Or perhaps she was disabled, and driven ashore by the gale. I know a lee shore is considered most dangerous in such a storm. You can see she has sprung a leak from the way she's settled by the head, for on that bar she should rest on an even keel. Looks like a tramp or cargo steamer. Very likely is; so there won't be any passengers——"

"No, she isn't a tramp," corrected Professor Dwyer, who was armed with a pair of night glasses. "That search-light shows up everything most clearly, and if I'm not in error she's a liner."

All interest was now transferred to the live-saving crews. A gun boomed, and a line went whirring over the tumbling waves. It fell short. Another and another, only to meet a like fate, or be swept away in the ravenous clutch of the gale.

Twice boats had been launched and promptly demolished.

Now it was in truth known that the ship was doomed. She could not help herself. She could not receive aid from the land. Hampton and Bow Head—the world, for that matter—could do nothing but impotently watch. Man was at bay; hemmed in and vanquished by the very elements over which he had learned to triumph.

Professor Dwyer was sadly moralizing on the impotency of pygmy man, and his little store of science when pitted against elemental Nature in her maddest mood, when a noise from the cliffs attracted his attention. It sounded like a whir of a motor, yet neither of boat nor auto; rather it somewhat resembled the beating of countless sticks against sheet tin. Moreover, it came from the air; from the heavens overhead.

Hampton, too, had heard it, and presently a great cry of astonishment and fear went up, and there was a scattering as from out the darkness overhead a mammoth-winged creature shot downward, skidded along the sand, and came to rest.

"An aëroplane!" cried Professor Dwyer.

"It's Mr. Jones!" yelled Bessie. "It's Mr. Jones!"

Yes, it was Mr. John Jones who, quite cool and collected, thus burst upon Hampton in the rôle of Man the Unconquerable. Science would still defy the element. Mr. Jones in his aëroplane would carry the life line to the doomed ship. Foiled in one direction, Unconquerable Man will attempt another. If

we cannot go by sea or land, we will try the aërial route.

Priceless minutes were consumed while Hampton voiced its astonishment and incredulity. By all odds, this was the most eventful night the town had known. Mr. Jones was insane. No aëroplane could live in such a gale. Mr. Jones was this, that, and the other thing. He was a hero, a fool, a madman, a dipsomaniac.

Clara and Bessie, aided by their respective fathers, at length won through the throng and the circle of life-savers holding the machine, and guarding it from the avidly curious.

"This is madness!" panted Clara, seizing the arm of Mr. Jones. "We have goaded you into doing this. I feel it; I know it! Your blood will be on our heads——"

"Now please break away, miss, will you?" interrupted Mr. Brown, the saturnine, silent gentleman, who was "teaching Mr. Jones how to fly." "The boss knows his business," he added, "and it's no time for fireworks. What he says goes, even if it means his own funeral."

"Oh, it won't be that," said Mr. Jones, ending his earnest controversy with the captains of the respective stations. He spoke tersely, hurriedly, yet with certain kindly feeling. "I'm well able to take care of myself, Miss Dwyer, and in no sense have I been goaded into attempting this. I realized from the first that if that ship is to be saved, it can only be through this method, so I hurried back for my machine."

He waved aside all protestation and argument—for the diffident Mr. Jones had been transformed into a master of emergency—and turning to Mr. Brown, added:

"Sam, I'll have to be minding my knitting, and there'll be no let-up, I'm thinking. So if you want to come along and handle the line, all right. That's not an order, mind you."

"It's good enough for me," said Sam, actually grinning. "Thank you, sir." He appeared pleased with the prospect of looking death fairly in the eye. It transformed his saturnine countenance.

Long since a huge fire of driftwood had been kindled on the beach, hurling back the darkness to the foot of the cliffs, where it transposed itself into fantastic shadows that played at hide and seek among the rocks. The searchlight from the Point still played upon the doomed vessel.

A detailed and entirely forgivable perfervid account—for even the blasé Fourth Estate, if the occasion be fitting, can wallow in double superlatives and hectic adjectives—of the carrying of the life line to the doomed *Antwerp*—the first instance of an aëroplane being utilized for such a purpose—may be found in the literature of the period. It is writ large in the record of man's achievement. It has become a legend in aviation circles, and even to the untechnical world it still stands an inspiring example of resourcefulness, skill, and courage.

But, primarily, this is a story of two young girls and a man whom they deemed a coward; a story which never crept into the literature of the period; one of which all the many chroniclers of the "Wreck of the *Antwerp*" were ignorant.

Our duty is to them.

When after a full hour of unceasing labor, the women and children had been safely transferred from the *Antwerp* in the twin breeches buoys—for the biplane, after securing the first line, had returned for a second—the male passengers began to dribble over, and among the last to arrive were two young men upon whom Clara and Bessie, after various physical and vocal evidences of excruciating emotion, promptly pounced.

These young gentlemen were Messrs. Harmon and Graves, who, finding business matters permitted their embarkment on an earlier vessel than the one mentioned in their letter, had sailed on the *Antwerp*, and, desiring it to be a surprise, had purposely omitted cabling their date of sailing.

"And you might never have known what became of us," added Harmon, finishing this explanation, "but for Mr.

Deneen. Great glory! But what a night's work. I'm not asking what brought him here, for he has a knack of being the man for the emergency. I don't think there's a man living who could have done what he has done. And Bleeker, too—— They're too big for words! I tell you, Bessie," pressing her arm, his voice tremulous, "you'll never know our sensations when we saw the *Vulture* shoot down that pencil of light from the Point. We knew we were goners, and were—were——"

"All bunched together like a Sunday-school flock, trying to pray or sing hymns, but making the darndest sort of noises," cut in Graves, laughing nervously, as he pressed Clara's responsive arm. "Then when Deneen circled us—maybe *that* wasn't some flying—clapped on the muffler, and megaphoned above the roar of the wind: 'On board the *Antwerp!* Stand by to make fast a line!' Gee, I bit myself to see if I was awake! I knew his voice, but I couldn't believe it was Billy Deneen, though who else could have done it——"

"Stop! Stop! *Stop!*" implored his audience. "The *Vulture!* Billy Deneen! Sam Bleeker! What are you talking about? That was a Mr. Jones, whom we know. An amateur——"

"Amateur!" Messrs. Harmon and Graves literally bellowed the epithet. "Amateur! After *that* work? Do you think any old person could, or would, take a plane out against that wind chock-full of 'holes'? But you're not serious. Of course, you know that was Deneen, his mechanic, Sam Bleeker, and the *Vulture*. What other combination could it be?"

"Help! Water!" cried Bessie feebly; suddenly, like Saul of Tarsus, seeing a great light. "Oh, *Clara——*"

"Oh, *Bessie,*" wailed Miss Dwyer. "And—and I said his machine wasn't *half* bad, and—and that he would never make an aviator!"

"And—and we said we knew Mr. Deneen. And I said he—he should see the *Vulture!* And we did want to meet him of all people, and—and now he's gone."

Yes, Mr. Deneen had gone; never returning to the wildly acclaiming shore; but, braving the gale, had flown straight home to his Bronx aërodrome.

Harmon, after hearing Clara's confession, offered an explanation that subsequently proved correct.

"Deneen's a frightfully modest celebrity," he said, "and would rather face an avalanche in full bloom than the cheers of the mob. After making his St. Louis record, even his Bronx place began to get too hot for him. Couldn't pop out his head without being snapped. No doubt he crept down here to dodge the mob, and naturally took an assumed name so he wouldn't be found out. Even such a night as this is nothing to him—you know he picks out the worst kind of weather just to 'keep his hand in,' as he calls it—and that's why he has preferred to now go home rather than face that crowd on the beach. You girls haven't been very—well, discerning. Your modest and diffident Mr. Jones, my innocent, young friends, is about the nerviest——"

"Please be quiet or we'll almost be sorry the *Antwerp* didn't go down in mid-ocean," gulped both innocents. "We'll never hear the last of 'Mr. Jones.'"

UNITING A FAMILY

BRAINERD H. WARNER, of Washington, has a mania for introducing people. He likes to see everybody have a good time, and he wants all his friends to know all the rest of his friends. As an introducer, he is an incessant wonder. At a reception at which he was making himself pleasant, he introduced Victor Kauffman to a certain lady twice in one evening.

At the second introduction, the lady said to Mr. Warner:

"Yes; I've met Mr. Kauffman once before this evening Besides, he married my daughter several years ago."

In the Shadow of the Kris

By Frank L. Packard

Author of "The Guardian of the Devil's Slide," "Shanley's Luck," Etc.

Captain Seaton, formerly of the U. S. Naval Academy, but now commander of the tramp *Traymore*, goes in quest of international adventure among the South Sea Islands. What he stumbles into has a much more personal interest to him. As the chief engineer puts it: "It was a grand fight."

(A Complete Novel)

CHAPTER I.

OUTSIDE she was a rusty, salt-crusted, down-at-the-heels-looking tramp; inside, and particularly as to her engine room, she was marvelously groomed. Lloyd's lists were dumb concerning her; and, her business being religiously at variance with the underwriters, the *Traymore,* so far as the maritime world at large was concerned, was an unknown quantity.

Five years back, Jack Seaton had bought her—bought her when the words of dismissal that sent him out from the Naval Academy at Annapolis, just a month before graduation, were still ringing in his ears. He had accepted the dismissal with the same silence that, despite the pleadings of his friends, he had maintained throughout the entire investigation that had preceded it; and then, barred from the service that he loved better than anything else on earth, the big ex-half back dropped as quietly as he could from sight and disappeared.

In a little port on the east coast of Africa he had come across the *Traymore*—she was then under another name—and the scanty capital left him by his parents just sufficed for her purchase. Since then the two, he and the *Traymore,* had been in many ports and in many seas, and had participated in many things quite foreign to the eminently staid and conservative code that governs the goings and comings of the merchant marine.

On the afternoon this story opens, the *Traymore* lay at anchor in the harbor of Singapore. Two men were in her cabin: Seaton, big, broad-shouldered, sun-tanned; a sharp contrast to the little, florid-faced man who sat at the opposite side of the table.

Seaton shook his head emphatically, and the hang of his under jaw was finality itself.

"I'll make it fifteen—fifteen hundred pounds—that's seven thousand five hundred dollars in your money," said the little, florid-faced man. "Good heavens, man, for a simple bit of business and no risk, it's a fabulous price!"

"Aye, it is—for a simple bit of business," returned Seaton; "but you're modest in your description, aren't you? As for the risk, the *Traymore's* risk enough, for she's all I've got."

"Two thousand pounds!" said the little man sharply. "And that's the last quid you'll squeeze out of me, Captain Seaton."

Seaton's jaws came together with a snap. "I'm not the kind to squeeze and screw," he said evenly. "Don't make that mistake. I want enough to make a fair profit over and above expenses, enough to make the deal worth while, and that's all I want. The sooner you

understand that, the sooner you'll understand *me*, and the sooner we'll do business—or we won't!"

The little man edged back in his chair, and eyed Seaton with a glance that combined both shrewdness and uncertainty.

"And further," continued Seaton, "I've got to know more before I go junketing around, and you'll have to open up, price or no price. Your name is Kallinger, you say; but that doesn't account for your offer of two thousand pounds to have me take the *Traymore* on a little pleasure cruise around the archipelago to get the scenic effects—hardly! Now, Mr. Kallinger, who's behind you, and what's the game?"

"I'm just offering to charter the ship for a month or so," said Mr. Kallinger.

"That's what you said before," returned Seaton.

Kallinger smiled. "I didn't expect that you would care—that is, that you would question too closely so long as the money was forthcoming. And as for that, it's cash down, captain, cash down. That's the main thing. We've heard of you often enough, Captain Seaton, Africa way, Japan, all over. You're pretty well known to some; and, you'll pardon my saying it, your reputation is pretty well established. I didn't think you'd be—er—overparticular."

"I'm not going to quarrel with you," said Seaton slowly, "because I don't think you quite understand. Your information is accurate in some ways, but in some ways it isn't. I have run some contraband, arms and otherwise, and I won't say I'm not known in some quarters; but when I'm running contraband, or anything else, I'm not fooling myself very much on what I am doing. Do you get that, Mr. Kallinger? If it's clean work with a bit of risk for spice, I'm game; if it's dirty work, you've come to the wrong shop."

"Your standard of righteousness has at least the merit of being original," said Kallinger, with a laugh.

Seaton shrugged his shoulders. "Possibly. I've run guns, and perhaps a blockade or two, and I'm willing to admit that I've nosed around more than one squib war in South America, but there's some things I won't do. Now, if you and I are going to deal, we'll have the whole story. I'll tell you yes or no. If it's yes, well and good; if it's no, then that ends it, and no harm done."

Kallinger got up from his seat, walked to the cabin door, swung it open, and stood looking shoreward from where the *Traymore* lay at her anchorage in the eastern harbor facing the town of Singapore. Seaton helped himself out of a box of very black cigars, and waited for the reply to his ultimatum.

After a moment, Kallinger shut the door, came back, resumed his seat, and leaned over the table.

"There's no help for it, I suppose—since you won't come any other way, and I've got to have you. I'd have preferred 'sealed orders,' I believe you call it, until we were clear of port. Things leak strangely sometimes, and the only way to be sure is to keep a close tongue."

"What you may say will go no further, whether I agree or not," said Seaton.

Kallinger nodded. "I've always heard that you played square," he responded; "but you can't blame me for not being overanxious to show my cards before the draw, especially to a stranger. First of all, will you answer a question, Captain Seaton?"

"That depends on the question. Fire ahead."

"Well, then, have you any sentimental objections to stacking up against the Britishers?"

Seaton watched a ring of smoke sail ceilingward. "I'm a Yankee," said he.

"And I," whispered Kallinger, leaning toward him suddenly, "am a secret agent of the French government."

For a moment Seaton stared without comment. "I wouldn't have rated you as French," he remarked imperturbably at last. "Your name——"

"My name has nothing to do with it," interposed Kallinger, a little sharply. "I'm down from Saigon, and on matters of this kind we don't carry docu-

ments to prove who we are or what our business is. I've no more than my word to offer you for that."

"I've no reason to dispute you," said Seaton; "and, so far, no reason to say I'm not with you. What's up between you and the cockneys?"

"That's what my business is—to find out. There may be much—or nothing. You know that most of the archipelago, in fact all of it, bordering the Java and Banda Seas belongs to the Dutch, or is under their provisional government; and, except for their northern possessions in Borneo, the British haven't a single holding where they want it, and want it *bad*—somewhere in the Java Sea, or maybe a little farther east—anywhere, so that it intercepts the direct route between here and Australia, and gives them a strategical position. Do you begin to see?"

"I can't say that I do," said Seaton, with a puzzled frown.

"No? Well, we believe that secret arrangements have been entered into between them and the Dutch, whereby one of the islands has been made over to the British, and which they propose to fortify and turn into a coaling station. It's against the laws of nations, Captain Seaton."

The ex-Annapolis man grinned. "I shouldn't be surprised," he commented.

"Our object is to secure proof, and nip the project in the bud," went on Kallinger. "That's why I want you and the *Traymore*. My plan is to cruise down the Java Sea, poking our nose in at every likely place. We'll give out that we're simply trading independently, and so won't excite any suspicion. To carry out the bluff, I'll have our agents here arrange to send a few cases of trinkets aboard. There really ought to be a chance to trade, and what you make out of that you can have over and above the two thousand pounds."

"What do you expect to find on this island, if you find it at all?" inquired Seaton, his eyes roving over the other speculatively.

"Oh, nothing as yet in the way of fortifications," replied Kallinger. "Things aren't that far along. There'll be a survey party probably, for we believe their engineers are already at work on the plans. Come now, Captain Seaton; we've offered you a good price, and you see there's no risk. You simply touch at the islands I specify, and have nothing to do with what goes on ashore. What do you say?"

"What do I say?" announced Seaton deliberately. "Why, that you and your fool government are just proper damned idiots! My private opinion is that you're digging up a mare's nest, and you might as well chase the moon. Man, there's about ten million islands in these parts, and I'm not sure but what there's an extra one or two on top of that. If you don't know any more than you say you do, you're simply crazy, for you'll never find it!"

"That," returned Kallinger, reaching into his inside vest pocket, "is our risk. I don't say we'll succeed; we certainly won't if we don't try. Win or lose, your money's safe. Will you take it now?"

A bundle of new English bank notes crackled crisply, invitingly, in Kallinger's hand as he finished speaking.

Seaton laughed. "All right," he said; "if you *will* spend it, I might as well have it as any one. Two thousand pounds a month, you said. Count out for the first month. It's a go."

"I said two thousand for the trip," demurred Kallinger.

Seaton shook his head decisively. "Hardly! Not on any wild-goose chase like this. We're as likely to be gone three months as one. Two thousand per month—that or nothing."

Kallinger shuffled the notes for a second or two in indecision; then he began to count.

"Very well," he agreed. "Here's the money."

Seaton crammed the notes into his trousers pocket, and stood up. "I guess the count's correct, and for a month you're owner. What're the orders?"

"I want to get out to-morrow night, if possible," said Kallinger briskly. "Can you manage it?"

"I guess we can," replied Seaton. "I've stores and coal aboard. I'll get

my papers in the afternoon—trading expedition you said, Mr. Kallinger?"

"Yes; I'll send out the gewgaws on a lighter in the morning—to make matters look straight. You won't have any trouble with your papers, will you?"

Seaton smiled. "I guess I'll manage to find my way about," he remarked.

"Good! I'll come aboard probably late in the afternoon, and I'll have a couple of men with me for the trip."

"A couple of men. What for? You didn't say anything about them before."

"They're engineers—our engineers," explained Kallinger. "I'm not posted technically myself, understand? You've no objection, have you?"

"No; I don't know that I have. I guess it's all right. You three can have this cabin, and I'll move into the chart house. Anything else?"

"I think not, except to ask you to say nothing of the object of our trip to any one until after we've sailed, and to warn you to keep clear of the British naval officers in port here—they're a prying crowd. There's one in particular, a lieutenant called Powell; he's never happy unless he's nosing into something or other."

"Oh, all right," said Seaton offhandedly; then suddenly: "What did you say the name was? Powell?" he demanded sharply.

"Yes; Powell. Why?"

"Nothing," replied Seaton shortly. "I thought I remembered the name, that's all. Now, then, Mr. Kallinger, if you've nothing more to say and you want to sail to-morrow night, it's about time I was getting busy."

"You're a queer man," remarked Kallinger, moving toward the door. "I hope we'll turn out to be great friends before this trip is over. Good-by, captain, for now."

"Good-by," responded Seaton, shaking hands absently, and with no indication that he had heard any but the latter part of the other's remark. "Good-by, Mr. Kallinger."

He followed the other to the deck, and, leaning on the rail, watched Kallinger go over the side into a shore boat. Then he whistled.

"That's a rum go!" he muttered. "Powell, eh? Let's see; it's two—no, three years ago, the time we were running contraband for the Boers, since I've seen him. Wonder if he ever found out what became of that cargo at 'Marquez?" Seaton chuckled reminiscently. "He was a junior lieutenant or some such thing as that then. I imagine he hasn't forgotten me, nor the *Traymore*, either. If he sees us there'll be suspicions—and a friendly call for tea. Well, let him come. We're as empty as we were the last time he saw us! Hanged if I wouldn't like to see him, for that matter. He nearly put me out of business—'twasn't his fault that he didn't; he's got the pluck of a dozen——"

Kallinger's boat was disappearing among the shipping, and with a last glance in that direction Seaton swung on his heel and walked down the deck toward the engine room.

CHAPTER II.

That night in Seaton's cabin, McCrie, the Scotch engineer, canny, wizened-faced, red-haired, and irascible, sat at one side of the table; on the other side was Fuller, the chief officer, gray-eyed, lean, and tall.

Seaton screwed around his chair from the head of the table, opened the locker behind him, and produced bottle and glasses.

"I've told you," said he, "that we sail to-morrow. Here's to a good voyage!"

"Here's hopin'!" said McCrie.

"Here's hopin'!" echoed Fuller.

McCrie set down his empty glass, and wiped his stubby little sandy mustache with the back of his hand.

"But, man," he suggested, "ye've no' told us for where nor for why."

"Trading," said Seaton, with a little smile. "Trading with the natives for a month, or maybe more. We're going to take it easy for a change."

McCrie sucked in his under lip, and stared at his commander.

"Tradin'!" cried Fuller. "*Us!* With what, Captain Seaton?"

"With what will be alongside in the

morning. Incidentally there will be a party of three aboard for the purpose of geographical observation——"

"Which is to say," interposed McCrie, "that we're chartered to the three?"

"We are," assented Seaton.

"For the purposes of geographical observation?"

Seaton smiled. "I *said* geographical observation; but their business is their own. Just what it is I'm not at liberty to say until we've left port. I'll admit, however, that to me there doesn't seem to be much sense in it; but the money is paid, and there is no risk as far as we are concerned."

"A fair price?" insinuated McCrie shrewdly.

"Enough for your wages," laughed Seaton, "and a bit over for the boat's share."

"Where are we goin' to trade?" inquired Fuller, picking up the conversation from the point where he had been dropped out of it.

Seaton pushed the bottle invitingly forward. McCrie helped himself, and passed it on to Fuller.

"Java Sea, Mr. Fuller," Seaton replied, "and perhaps east to the Banda, though I hardly think we'll go that far."

Fuller set down his glass, already halfway to his lips, with a thump that spilled a good portion of the contents on the table.

"Java Sea, d'ye say!" he cried. "Blimy! Captain Seaton, d'ye remember Powell, Lieutenant Powell, of H. M. S. *Portsmouth?* Him that boarded us on the east coast of Africa, the chap we fooled afterward to the top of his bent at 'Marquez?"

"I'm thinkin' he was no' so badly fooled, Mr. Fuller," corrected McCrie. "He couldn't prove anything. Give the man his due."

For the second time that day Seaton had heard Powell's name mentioned—the first time in three years—first by Kallinger, and now by his chief officer. Before he could reply, Fuller went on:

"I meant to have told you when I came aboard this evening, but the news that we were goin' to sail knocked everything else out of my head. About the first man I saw when I went ashore to-day was that same Powell. Blimy! I knew him the minute I clapped eyes on him. He stared at me pretty hard, an' I reckon he remembered he'd seen me before, but whether he placed me or not, I can't say."

"If he did," said Seaton, "he'll be paying us a visit before long. I've rather been looking for him. Kallinger—the man we're chartered to—told me Powell was here. What has he got to do with the Java Sea that put you in mind of him?"

"He'll pay us no visit this trip," asserted Fuller; "an' as for what he has to do with the Java Sea, I'll come to that in a minute. Ye'll understand I wasn't hankerin' any for his company, an' I dove out of sight as quick as I could; and, bein' a little curious about his turnin' up in these parts, I used my tongue. He's been on this station for the last two years. Ye'll have noticed the gunboat in the western harbor that put out this afternoon? Well, she's the *Ajax,* an' he's in command; an' since she's gone an' him with her, that's why he won't be payin' us any visit."

"I noticed her clawing out with the tide," nodded Seaton. "Perhaps it's just as well he has gone. Not that there's anything he could find fault with aboard; but, as McCrie here should be painfully aware, there's no living down a bad reputation. Eh, McCrie?" he grinned.

"'Twould be true with some men an' things, Captain Seaton," snapped the little Scotchman. "Ye can best speak for yourself. Tell us the rest, Mr. Fuller."

"Well," continued Fuller, "you know how things leak along the water fronts, in the boardin' houses an' the like? If you want information, ye'll get it there—from common talk to government secrets spilled by some blabbin' idiot who's taken more'n was good for him. What's doin' I don't know. That part didn't leak out—but this did: *Powell's sailed on a secret mission for a cruise in the Java Sea!"*

McCrie twisted his glass absently in

his fingers, and looked at Seaton. Fuller, after his pause, had leaned back in his chair to allow this startling piece of information to sink in.

But Seaton received the news in quite a different manner than his subordinates evidently expected.

"Granted that he has, Fuller," he remarked. "It's not the first time a British boat has been in those waters, and I don't imagine it will be the last, either. There is room for us both, if that is what you mean."

"Mabbe there is, an' mabbe there ain't," returned Fuller significantly. "I ain't so sure. There's a queer look to it from my way of thinkin'."

"Thinking queer seems to be a habit of yours," said Seaton a little sharply. "You're worse than an old woman for smelling out trouble ahead—when it doesn't exist."

Fuller's face reddened. "Old woman or not, I say it looks fishy," he persisted sullenly. "Here's Powell turnin' up after three years or more, an' startin' off for the same place as us on a secret mission—same as us. Only we're goin' *tradin'*! I say there's something up, down that way, an' the reason Powell's goin' is the same reason this chap that's chartered us is goin'. You can take it or leave it, Captain Seaton, but I'll lay you a month's pay I'm right. I'll leave it to McCrie, here. Tradin'—my eye!"

"I'd no' say," ventured McCrie cautiously; "but I'm minded Mr. Fuller has the right of it."

"I didn't say the object of the cruise *was* to trade," said Seaton, in a tone he would employ in humoring a child. "Can't I get that idea out of your heads? That's simply the way we'll knock in the time, and the *excuse* for going. I shouldn't be surprised if Kallinger and Powell did have something in common; but, as I've told you before, it wouldn't affect us one way or the other. We'll have nothing to do with that. In any event the money is down, and the *Traymore* sails to-morrow night."

"Very good," said Fuller, "I'm not kickin'; we've been at the game, the three of us, for the matter of four years an' more, an' we've always pulled through, though close enough sometimes to take the skin off your teeth. It's the easy thing an' fair sailin' I'm afraid of—it ain't natural for us. Risk, an' the chances ten to one against us, we're used to. Some day there'll be an end to our picnic, an' the squall'll come from a clear sky. Don't say I didn't warn you, Captain Seaton."

"Pass the bottle," said Seaton goodhumoredly. "You're a morbid ass."

McCrie wagged his head. "I know how ye feel, Mr. Fuller," he volunteered. "I've a premonition——"

"Hang on to it then, if you don't mind, McCrie," laughed Seaton, filling his glass. "I guess your share of two thousand pounds a month will help you to digest it. It's enough to drive a man to drink"—suiting the action to the words—"the pair of you."

"'Twould go a long way, two thousand pounds—it's a tidy bit of money," said McCrie seriously.

"I'm going to turn in," announced Seaton, rising and shoving the bottle toward the others for a final glass. "And from the way you've been talking, I don't think a little sleep would do either of you any harm. You keep to your machinery, McCrie, and leave the rest to me. Fuller, you pass the word forward that there is no shore leave to-morrow."

"Aye, sir; an' what about the loadin'?"

"There'll be a lighter alongside in the morning with the cases. Put them down the main hatch."

"Aye, sir," replied Fuller again.

"And, Fuller," added Seaton, halting the mate as he and McCrie moved toward the doorway, "you're such a suspicious individual, perhaps it would ease your mind a bit if a case or two broke in the tackles accidentally. There'd be no questions asked."

"It often happens, sir, loadin' from lighters. They're a clumsy lot, the lightermen."

Seaton smiled. "They are," he agreed; "but they're not blind. Bear that in mind."

"Cases generally break *inboard,* sir, fallin' down the hatchway. Good night, sir, if that's all."

"So they do," said Seaton, his smile broadening. "Good night."

CHAPTER III.

It was late in the evening of the next day when Seaton, having satisfactorily concluded his business ashore, which business looked to the procuring of his clearance papers, came over the side of the *Traymore.*

"So you're aboard ahead of me, eh, Mr. Kallinger?" said he, as that individual met him at the gangway. "Others here?"

"Good evening, captain. Yes; they're in the cabin. We're ready to start, if you are. The sooner the better."

Fuller came forward from the shadows of the chart house.

"I guess we're ready, Mr. Kallinger," said Seaton. "How about it, Fuller?"

"We're ready, sir," replied the mate.

"Good!" said Seaton briskly. "Tell McCrie to stand by. I'll see you after we are under way, Mr. Kallinger, if you'll excuse me for the present."

"Certainly, captain, certainly," agreed Kallinger affably. "I don't want to be in the way. Come to the cabin when you're ready."

Slowly and cautiously, the *Traymore* picked her way through the shipping and out of the harbor. Then, with a free course and the open sea ahead, Seaton, on the bridge, swung over the engine-room indicator to "full speed," and glanced at the binnacle.

"A point to starboard," he ordered the seaman at the wheel. "Steady! Keep her as she goes."

"Aye, aye, sir," replied the man. "Steady she is, sir."

It was a night a sailor loves better than he does his sweetheart. Astern, the quickened thrash of the propeller churned the sea into sparkling phosphorescence that, as the *Traymore* gained speed, trailed off into ribbons of white, creamy foam. Overhead, the night was cloudless, star-studded everywhere, the full moon flooding the decks with a soft light. Forward, the sailors' chantey died away with the last clank of the windlass as they housed the hawsers, giving place to the steady throb of the engines, and the lapping of the water along the sides.

Seaton leaned over the weather cloth puffing his Manila. As he watched, Fuller made his way along the deck in the direction of the bridge.

"It's a fine night, Fuller," was his greeting, when the mate came up the port ladder. "A fine night."

"Aye," replied Fuller, "it's a fine night, sir; couldn't ask for better." He touched Seaton's arm, and moved down the bridge out of hearing of the helmsman. "I've been wantin' a chance to talk to you, sir. There's four of the hands didn't come aboard."

Seaton swung around like a flash, and his face grew black as he glared at Fuller. "What's that you say? Didn't I tell you to stop shore leave! A pretty mess we'll be in, four short. Confound you! Why didn't you wait until we were halfway to Borneo before saying so!"

"That part's all right," said Fuller hastily. "I did stop shore leave; but these four—it's Martin, Tom Bailey, Shanks, and O'Rourke—went ashore yesterday, ye'll recollect. Blimy! If ever I set eyes on 'em again, I'll bash their faces for this! I will that, the swine! I wasn't surprised that they didn't show up last night, but this mornin' after you'd gone, I began to wonder. About noon, I sent the boatswain to look for 'em. When he came back, he said he couldn't find any trace of 'em anywhere, but in nosin' around the boardin' houses he'd found some likely-lookin' fellows that offered to ship. He told 'em he'd report an' let 'em know. I talked it over with McCrie, an' we figured we couldn't sail shorthanded like that, so we sent the boatswain back after 'em, an' had 'em come aboard. They sized up, all right, an' we shipped 'em."

Seaton swore. "Don't you know any better than that?" he screamed. "A sweet way to pick a crew for our business, that is!"

"Ordinarily I know it is, an' we wouldn't have done it; but for a cruise like this, which you said yourself was free, open, an' aboveboard, we couldn't figure that it made much difference so long as we had the men. If we don't like 'em, we can let 'em go after the voyage is over."

"Well, perhaps you're right," said Seaton. "They're aboard, anyhow, so there's an end to that. How about those cases, Fuller?"

Fuller sniffed. "We stove in three of 'em. Of all the bally loot you ever clapped your eyes on, it's the limit. Beads, bits of cloth that look like they were out of a crazy quilt, cheap looking-glasses, and stuff like that."

Seaton laughed. "Well, that ought to lull your suspicions, Fuller. I'm not much up on trading as an art, but we seem to have the proper implements of warfare from all I've heard." He tossed his cigar stump overboard, and took a turn up and down the bridge. "I guess I'll look in on Kallinger and his crowd, and see how they are getting along," he announced, as he came back to Fuller.

"All right," returned Fuller ungraciously. "I hope you admire 'em more'n I do. From the looks of 'em, I wouldn't trust 'em farther than I could chuck a ship's biscuit."

"What's the matter with them?"

"I don't like the looks of 'em, that's all. They'll bear watchin', I'll lay my davy to that. That's the way McCrie feels about it, too."

"Oh, does he! Well, you and McCrie will have plenty of opportunity for watching them in the next month or so. Any more troubles?" inquired Seaton sarcastically.

Fuller scowled, but made no reply; and Seaton, with the terse direction, "Southeast by east, Mr. Fuller," went down the ladder.

His cabin, that he had turned over to Kallinger, occupied the forward end of the deck house, which was built well aft of amidships. He swung around the corner of the chart house beneath the bridge, which was now his own quarters, and made his way leisurely along the deck toward the stern, whistling softly to himself.

Just as he reached the cabin and prepared to knock, the door was opened, and some one darted out. Seaton's whistle died away. The flood of light from the interior of the cabin, making him blink, added a grotesque and deceptive appearance to the figure that, for a moment, looked like some ghostly apparition in loose, flowing white garments.

Seaton's arm shot out, his hand descended like a bolt on the other's shoulder, crept round and closed viselike on the nape of the neck, and the next instant he had stepped inside the cabin, dragging his wriggling captive with him.

"Hell!" he ejaculated, and let go his hold.

A little, undersized, sallow-faced Chinaman fled chattering to the farthest corner.

A laugh came from the table.

"Startled you, did he, captain?" It was Kallinger speaking. "It's only my servant, Ching Lang. He's remarkably ugly, I'll admit, but otherwise I've had no reason to complain of him. I forgot to speak to you about him yesterday. We can use him as mess steward, and I suppose he'll be able to find a place to tuck himself away up forward somewhere with the crew."

"Aye, I suppose so," said Seaton, his eyes on the Chinaman, "though I can't say I'm exactly pleased, Mr. Kallinger. I'm not fond of the ratty devils with their yellow teeth. This chap has got the face of a monkey."

At Seaton's words, Ching Lang's lips widened into what might have been construed as a grin, had it not been for the eyelids that narrowed into angry little slits.

"Oh, you understand, do you?" said Seaton grimly, interpreting the look.

Kallinger, seemingly anxious to distract his attention from the Chinaman, had risen from the table, and now took his arm.

"I want to present you to my friends, Captain Seaton. This is Monsieur Vernier, one of the most efficient, and I might add trusted, engineers in the

French service. Unfortunately Monsieur Vernier does not speak English."

At mention of his name, the man across the table rose, and extended his hand.

"Enchanté; je vous assure, capitaine," he said, with a bow.

"Glad to know you," returned Seaton bluntly, sizing up the man rapidly as he gripped the offered hand.

"And this," continued Kallinger, completing the introduction, "is Monsieur Knapp, assistant to Monsieur Vernier. Monsieur Knapp, as you will appreciate, speaks English as fluently as yourself."

Knapp's acknowledgment of the introduction, while not so effusive as his confrère's, was perhaps more sincere. He shook hands with a smirky grin, his eyes on a line with somewhere in the neighborhood of Seaton's midriff.

A pack of cards, bottle, and glasses were on the table.

"We were amusing ourselves at your national game, captain," explained Kallinger. "We'd be glad to have you join us, though I'm afraid we shall all be at your mercy."

"Well, I don't know." Seaton hesitated. In view of what McCrie and Fuller had said, an opportunity of getting a little better acquainted with these men might not come amiss.

"Of course, you will," insisted Kallinger heartily. "Here, sit in between Knapp and myself. Ching, bring another bottle of that 'special.'"

And Seaton sat in.

The game progressed smoothly, and with increasing good-fellowship, as one bottle of "special" succeeded another, with the result that, little by little, Seaton's first, and not altogether favorable, appraisal of the low-browed, shifty Knapp, and the suave, ingratiating Vernier gave place to a more friendly understanding.

The little pile of gold and silver in front of him gradually increased. He changed a five-pound note at Vernier's request, made in pantomime, and stacked the balance of his coin upon it as a paper weight. After a while another note was added to the first, and even an increased assortment of sovereigns, crowns, and "bobs." His luck was phenomenal.

Usually abstemious and careful to the last degree, Seaton realized in a misty sort of a way as the game went on that, though he had drunk sparingly, the "special" was getting the better of him. He ventured an opinion.

"Pretty strong stuff, isn't it?" he remarked.

Kallinger held a glass up to the light. "Bottled twenty years," he announced proudly. "I'll risk the statement that you never tasted better in your life, captain. What have you got? Aces up?"—as Seaton laid his hand on the table. "Well, that's good. You're certainly unbeatable." And his hand went into the discard.

As the hours went on, the absolute good nature with which his companions accepted their losses, coupled with the chaff and banter that circulated around the table, broke down, with the further aid of the "special," the last of Seaton's lingering reserve, to the extent that once, after making the haul of a rather substantial pot, he arose and gravely proposed a drink to the confusion of the British and the prosperity of the French —a proposal which was received with vociferous applause.

It was about the beginning of the morning watch, four o'clock, when the game broke up with mutual protestations of good will, and Seaton, more unsteadily than the pitch of the ship warranted, headed along the deck in the direction of the chart house. He halted a moment by the open scuttle of the engine-room hatch, and peered down at the rise and fall of the machinery, running as sweet and true as the breath of a babe—thanks to McCrie's paternal care.

Seaton had some hazy idea of quieting any forebodings the engineer might harbor in reference to either the voyage or the passengers, but McCrie not being in evidence, he passed on. At the door of the chart room he hailed the bridge for Fuller.

Thorpe, the second, answered him: "Mr. Fuller's turned in, sir; it's just

gone one bell in the morning watch. Anything you want, sir?"

Seaton did not answer. He lunged into the chart room, and groped for a light.

"Fuller's an ass," he explained to his surroundings; and, as an afterthought: "So's McCrie! Both asses! Kallinger's all right; so's the others. Forgot to tell Kallinger 'bout Powell. Tell him in the morning."

And in a decidedly unaccustomed condition for him, Seaton laboriously disrobed and rolled into his bunk.

CHAPTER IV.

Fair weather and smooth seas were the lot of the *Traymore,* and, fast for her class, she steadily reeled off her ten knots each hour of the twenty-four.

Aboard, as the days went by, both McCrie and Fuller, though they now knew the real object of the voyage as well as their commander, remained faithful to their original distrust, holding themselves cordially aloof from their passengers despite the repeated advances toward a warmer footing made by Kallinger and his friends.

"I'm no' much of a hand at cards, Captain Seaton," McCrie had said, with a sour look, when Seaton had brought up the subject. And Seaton had reddened at the fling, but made no reply.

As for Seaton himself, he had no occasion to change, or even question, the friendly relations established by the poker game. He had brought the matter of Powell's departure, and the possibility of the latter's objective point being the same as their own, to Kallinger's attention on the first day out. Kallinger, however, had differed from this view.

"Not much!" he had said. "They're too cute for that. You don't imagine they are going to invite attention to the place by the presence of a man-of-war, do you? You won't see anything of them, if that's bothering you."

And Seaton, caring very little about it one way or the other, had let the matter drop, and even the subject of their own destination did not come up again until the evening of the fourth day out from Singapore, when, as Seaton was studying over his chart, there came a rap at the door.

"Come in," he called.

Kallinger entered, and closed the door behind him.

"I wanted to have a little chat with you, captain," he began; "and, first, I'd like to get a fairly approximate idea of our position."

Seaton nodded, and jabbed a point of his dividers down on the chart. "Hereabouts," he replied. "A hundred miles or so off Selatan Point, and due south of the coast of Borneo."

"I see," said Kallinger, bending over Seaton's shoulder. He straightened up after a minute, and, going around to the other side of the table, dropped into a chair. "I want to say, Captain Seaton," he went on, "that I haven't been perfectly frank with you."

"You haven't *what?*" demanded Seaton sharply, sitting up with a jerk.

Kallinger waved his hand, and smiled easily. "It's a small matter. I think you'll agree I was justified. Our information as to the location of the island we're after is a little more specific than I led you to believe. You see, it wasn't a very vital factor in your decision, and I considered I was neither misleading nor deceiving you by keeping it to myself."

Seaton's dividers beat a tattoo on the table. "It doesn't make any difference in itself," he said slowly; "not a particle. But, if you knew this all the time, what did you load us up with that trading truck for?"

Kallinger laughed. "Because I want you to use it. That's your excuse for lying in the harbor, if any one came along and questioned you. While Vernier, Knapp, and I are ashore, you will be dealing in anything from edible nests to resin, though I'd advise you to stick to such stuff as ivory, opium, and tobacco. You can always market that, you see, and there's a huge profit in it. But I didn't come in to talk to you about trading. We're pretty well down in the neighborhood we're aiming for, and I thought it was about time to let

you know just where we were going." Kallinger paused.

"All right," said Seaton. "Go on. I'm listening."

"Do you know where the island of Kangean is?"

"Yes; it's a bit north of the Bali Strait. Here it is." Seaton indicated it on the chart. "Is that where we're bound for?"

"Not exactly," replied Kallinger. "There's a couple of small islands a little to the north again. The more westerly of the two is the one we want. Do you make them out?"

They were little more than pin pricks on the chart, and it took a moment's close scrutiny before Seaton found them. Then he whistled. The old academy training made manifest instantly their strategical importance, commanding as they did Macassar Strait to the north, Bali to the south, and the sweep of the Java Sea east and west.

"I see you appreciate the importance of their position, captain," said Kallinger, evidently reading Seaton's expression correctly. "The Britishers are no fools, when it comes to things of this kind."

"Are they inhabited at all except for the natives?" inquired Seaton, ignoring Kallinger's remark.

"No; just the Malays, Dyaks, Chinese, and that sort of thing. They're a little out of the regular track, as you see, and not visited much, I understand —another thing, by the way, in their favor from the English point of view. When would you say we should make them?"

"We'll rise them by noon to-morrow, if we change course to-night," replied Seaton, after a rapid calculation. "How about it, Mr. Kallinger; do you want to stand in by daylight?"

"Oh, yes," said Kallinger; "we'll stand right in just as we ordinarily would if trading were our sole object. It doesn't matter if we are seen. There's nothing about us to indicate that we're anything but what we pretend to be. As I said, while you're trading we'll be doing our work ashore. I intend striking straight in from the harbor and pitching camp, taking, with your permission, a few of the hands to do the rough work that is required."

"Daylight it is, if you say so," said Seaton. "You're the doctor. Speaking of harbors, I suppose there is one that will answer the purpose."

"Oh, yes," returned Kallinger; "Ching says there's a good one."

"Ching says so!" repeated Seaton sharply. "What the devil does he know about it?"

"Why," replied Kallinger easily, "he comes from these parts, and it seems that he has been here before."

"Oh, he does, eh? Look here, Mr. Kallinger; it strikes me there was a good deal you didn't open up about before leaving Singapore. Is there anything else?"

"Why, no; I guess you've got it all now. I don't want you to feel huffy about this. Put yourself in my place, and I think you're a fair enough man to admit that you would have done just as I did. I didn't know you any more than you knew me. What I've held back wasn't much, and, as I've said, couldn't possibly mislead you in your decision, while, on the other hand, it would have been just enough to have queered me if you had wanted to go back on me. That's the story about as plain as I can put it."

Open-handed himself, before Kallinger's explanation, made in rather hurt tones, Seaton's irritation vanished.

"We won't say anything more about it, Mr. Kallinger," he said, dismissing the subject. "You want me to shape up for the island at once, I suppose?"

"Yes," replied Kallinger, rising. "I'm glad you feel all right about it. You'll have our course to work out, and I'll leave you to do it. Good night, captain."

"Good night, Mr. Kallinger," responded Seaton, as the door closed.

For the next fifteen minutes Seaton busied himself with his calculations, and then, having worked out his course as accurately as dead reckoning would permit, he left the chart room and mounted the bridge.

"You'll change to sou'-sou'east, Mr.

Fuller," he ordered, as the mate's form loomed up coming toward him from the other end of the bridge.

"Aye, sir; sou'-sou'east, it is," replied Fuller, and repeated the course to the man at the wheel.

"We'll make port to-morrow at a bit of an island to the north of Kangean, Fuller," explained Seaton. "Kallinger says that's where the Britishers are."

"I thought he didn't know," remarked Fuller.

"So did I; but it seems he did. I don't see that it matters much except to cut the voyage short a little."

"If that's all it matters, it'll be a good thing, to my way of thinkin'," grumbled Fuller crossly. "I haven't liked this business from first to last, an' I don't like it any better now."

"Look here," said Seaton suddenly, "what's the matter with you, Fuller, anyway? If you've got anything on your mind, let's have it. Anything happened out of the way?"

"No," admitted Fuller; "there hasn't. It's the *feel* that things ain't right that's got me, an' I can't get away from it."

"Perhaps you'd advise going about, and putting back to Singapore," suggested Seaton sarcastically.

"I would! So help me, I *would!*" The words came away in a gust of fierce assertion.

Seaton, taken aback, stared for a moment in mute astonishment. "Don't be a fool, man," he said sharply. "You're not a child, Fuller. By the way, what's going on forward? They've been kicking up didos for the last hour or more. Something new for our lot, isn't it?"

From the forecastle, as he spoke, came the shuffling sound of many feet in a sailor's breakdown, keeping time to the furious strumming of a banjo. It ended in a burst of applause, presumably by the participants themselves; and then, the banjo going again, "Sailor Sam," in a by no means bad baritone, floated up to the bridge:

"'Ow, bless my soul,' said Sailor Sam,
'Wot a great, big fool of a goose Hi am,
Hi've got a girl hin hevery port,
An' hit's all the sime to me!'"

"It's the new crowd," explained Fuller, "that we shipped in place of Martin an' the others. They're rough, if you like; but I've no fault to find with 'em. They do their work."

Seaton was laughing, and he gave Fuller a friendly slap on the back. "Well, I'm glad something satisfies you," he grinned, and, bidding the mate good night, went down the ladder.

Back in the chart room, with the thought in mind of the natives who would probably be aboard the next day to trade, Seaton unlocked the drawer of the table containing the ship's papers where he had placed the two thousand pounds Kallinger had given him. There was a more secure hiding place for the money than that. A piece of the deck plank under the head of the bunk on the port side had been arranged for just such contingencies. He got down on his knees, started it with his clasp knife, and lifted it up. Folding the notes, he placed them in the hollow, and put back the decking, hammering it down solidly with his fist.

A little heated from the cramped position as he rose to his feet, he walked to the door, and threw it open with the intention of standing in the doorway a few moments for the sake of the breeze. He drew back quickly with a startled exclamation. Before him was the figure of Ching Lang.

"What the devil are you doing here?" he demanded sharply.

"Excellency Kallinger send know you want play poker?" replied the Celestial glibly.

Seaton stared at him suspiciously. Ching Lang stood humbly, patiently waiting.

"No," said Seaton at last. "Tell Mr. Kallinger not to-night. I'm going to turn in."

He watched the Chinaman glide away, and then reëntered the chart room, shutting the door with a vicious bang. He took off his coat, preparing to turn in, and mechanically reached up to draw the window curtains. His hand stopped halfway suddenly, and the next minute he was out of the chart room and hurrying down the deck to Kallinger's cabin.

Without waiting for a reply to his knock, he thrust his head inside. The three men were sitting around the table, playing.

"Did you send Ching Lang to ask me to play, Mr. Kallinger?" he demanded abruptly.

"Yes," said Kallinger promptly. "Come in. I thought you weren't coming."

"Neither I am," returned Seaton. "I found him snooping around the outside of the chart room, and I wanted to make sure he wasn't lying."

"That's all right," Kallinger reassured him. "I sent Ching with the message. Sure you won't play, after all, captain?"

"No," said Seaton; "not to-night, thanks just the same."

"Better," urged Knapp, while Vernier smiled invitingly.

"No; too much to do to-morrow," replied Seaton decisively. "Good night."

He shut the door, and walked back to the chart room. They were still singing on the forward deck, and he paused a moment to listen before going in.

"I guess I'm getting as bad as Fuller," he muttered, "though it was just as well to make sure, and it was a fool trick to leave that blind up. Ugh! I never did like Chinamen, anyway."

CHAPTER V.

Seaton's calculations had proved to be correct, and by noon the next day the *Traymore,* slowed down to quarter speed, was feeling her way cautiously along the coast of an island of not inconsiderable size, and which Ching Lang pronounced to be Sampi.

Low and flat by the shores, though thick with vegetation, the interior rose wild and mountainous, terminating in two lofty peaks that seemed to divide the island in the middle. Between these, some five to six miles to the eastward, one caught a glimpse of a thin ribbon of blue, and then the sister island of Puli, that since entering the lee of Sampi from the open sea had been shut out from view.

Seaton, with the caution of a good seaman, began to take soundings as they stood in for the shore.

Kallinger hailed him from the deck.

"Ching says there's deep water right in," he called, "and a good harbor. He says he can pilot you, if you like."

Seaton leaned over the weather cloth of the bridge, and stared down.

"Plenty much water allee way," corroborated the Chinaman, who was standing beside Kallinger. "Me boy here. Me show?"

"Go forward there with Mr. Fuller, then; but have a care what you're doing," consented Seaton, a little dubiously.

"Me savvy all light," grinned Ching, and started forward.

Seaton watched him make his way to the forecastle, where Fuller and a couple of seamen were busy with the lead; then he bellowed through his hands at the chief officer.

"Forward, there, Mr. Fuller! Ching says he can pilot us in. Keep your eye on him, and the lead going."

"Aye, aye, sir," responded Fuller. "Eight fathoms, sir."

But Seaton need have had no cause to doubt his volunteer pilot's ability. Ching's work was masterly.

At the expiration of half an hour they had drawn close in to the island, skirting and finding their way between reefs with marvelous precision; and then, when there had seemed to be no break in the shore line, suddenly a narrow channel, some two hundred yards wide, opened up ahead.

It appeared to reach inland. How far could not be determined from the ship's deck, as it twisted sharply almost at the entrance. As they entered it and worked slowly along, it became a succession of short, tortuous turns, so short at times that, with the swing of the ship, it seemed the *Traymore* would ground astern.

A black look settled on Seaton's face, and his lips set in grim lines, while his eyes never left the figure of the little Chinaman perched on the forecastle beside Fuller.

Ching Lang, however, seemed per-

fectly self-possessed and entirely at ease. His arms moved semaphore fashion, now to the right, now to the left, while, amplifying his movements, his squeaky voice floated aft: "Stlarbo'd! Plort!"

Suddenly Seaton gasped. Without a minute's warning, they swung abruptly, the channel was behind them, and they had emerged into a large, landlocked lagoon. He wheeled quickly on the bridge, and rubbed his eyes as he stared astern. They were shut in everywhere, and only the swirl of the steamer's wake indicated the position of the channel behind them.

The lagoon was perhaps a mile in length, the length paralleling the coast line of the island itself. In width it was much narrower, not more than a quarter of a mile at the most.

Ahead of them, on the inland side of the lagoon, the shore stretched away in a thick forest, the trees and vegetation reaching almost to the fringe of sandy beach that gleamed white in the sunshine. Here and there, peeping through the foliage, could be seen little clusters of huts. On the beach itself were a number of long, black objects that Seaton rightly judged to be native canoes.

Kallinger had gone forward to Fuller and Ching, leaving Vernier and Knapp by the rail below the bridge. Now he came back and joined them. After a few words, he hailed Seaton.

"Ching says those huts ahead are the only village on the island, captain. I think the handiest thing we can do is to anchor as near there as possible."

"All right," agreed Seaton. "Forward, there, Mr. Fuller! Make ready to let go!"

"Aye, sir," responded Fuller. "All ready, sir."

Seaton swung the *Traymore* broadside with the shore, coming in in a long curve, and then backed his engines till she lost way.

"Let go, Mr. Fuller!" he roared.

"All gone, sir," answered the mate.

There was a splash, the clang and rattle of chain, and the *Traymore* lay quietly swinging to her anchor some two hundred yards from shore.

Seaton left the bridge, and joined Kallinger and his companions.

"We've evidently caused some excitement," Kallinger remarked, waving his hand shoreward. "I suppose that's the chief, or whatever he calls himself, coming out to see who we are and what we want."

Groups of natives had gathered at the water's edge, and, as Kallinger had indicated, a canoe was already putting off from the beach.

Seaton nodded, watching the canoe as it approached.

"Better make His Highness a present of some of your trading stuff to put him in a good humor," suggested Kallinger. "Ching can have a powwow with him, and then we'll decide the best thing to do."

The canoe, propelled by ten paddlers, approached swiftly until within fifteen or twenty yards of the *Traymore,* when it stopped. Its occupants appeared to be composed of about an equal mixture of Chinese and Malays. The man in the bow, evidently the chief, stood up, and began to gesticulate, shouting some words.

Ching answered him, and, after the exchange of a few sentences, turned to Kallinger.

"Him say likee come 'bloard," he translated.

"Tell him to come on," said Seaton.

Ching spoke rapidly for a moment, pointing to where Fuller was lowering the gangway, and the canoe moved forward.

Seaton scowled, and eyed the chief with little favor, as he came over the side. He was an undersized, brown-complexioned fellow with long, black, coarse hair, and his grin of welcome stamped his features with undeniable malignity.

Kallinger, setting the pace, advanced, and shook hands. "We've got to show we're friendly," he explained.

Vernier, Knapp, and, lastly, Seaton, followed suit.

This ceremony ended, Kallinger again took the initiative.

"We'll take him into the cabin, give him a drink or two, and the present of

a bottle—he'll favor that more than anything you've got in the hold, captain—and find out if he knows of any white men being on the island. Tell him, Ching."

Ching, who had begun to chatter volubly with the Malay, stopped abruptly as he was addressed.

"Him know me. Boy here. Say how do. Me tell him."

The program was evidently to the chief's taste, for he nodded and grinned.

"Come along, then," said Kallinger.

"What about these fellows below here?" demanded Seaton, peering over the side at the canoe.

Again Ching translated. "They wait," he informed Seaton.

"All right," said Seaton. "You go ahead, Mr. Kallinger, and get what you can out of him. I'll join you after a bit, when I've seen things shipshape and shaken down."

And Kallinger agreeing, the group moved off in the direction of the cabin, leaving Seaton with Fuller, who had lingered by the gangway watching the scene.

"Fuller," said Seaton shortly, "chuck down some of that trading stuff into the canoe, and post a man at the gangway here to keep an eye on them."

"Aye, sir," grunted Fuller. "Are ye——"

But Seaton was already stamping down the deck, leaving Fuller's unfinished sentence in the air.

It was half an hour before, his duties concluded, Seaton joined Kallinger and the others in the cabin.

"Well, what did you find out?" he demanded.

"More than we hoped for," replied Kallinger, with every appearance of being in a very happy frame of mind. "The chief here, his name is Koru, or something like that—Ching, fill up the chief's glass, only put more water in it—says that about two weeks ago a ship touched on the other side of the island, landed some men, and then went away again, and, once or twice since, his hunting parties have found traces of them, though they've never actually come into contact. I guess there's no question about the English surveyors and engineers being here, and with the chief's help it won't be very hard to find their camp."

"And then what?"

"And then? Why, we'll get their plans—that's all our government wants—without force if possible; by force if necessary. Vernier and Knapp will go over them and the ground itself to see just what was proposed. That will make our case sure in any court of arbitration, which, of course, the French government will apply for, and that's all there will be to it."

"When are you going to start? Great Scott!" This last as Seaton watched the Malay gulp down a huge tumbler of rum and water at a single draft.

"We've just been talking that over, and Knapp thinks we ought to go at once. It's only two o'clock now, and we could get away by three readily. If those fellows have been here two weeks now, there's no telling how soon it will be before the ship, or whatever they came in, may be back, either for them or to bring them supplies. In that case, we ought to lose no time, especially as we've got to count on maybe a day or two before we find them. As I told you before, we'll want some men to do the rough work, and make our force strong enough to preclude the possibility of any serious trouble with the party we're after. I think that, besides ourselves, four, say, would do. I was speaking to one of those fellows who were singing last night, and he says that he and one or two of his mates have had a good deal of experience in the woods and bush—somewhere down in Australia, I believe he said. If that's so, they're just the ones we want."

"I can't say anything about that," said Seaton, "because I don't know. They're a new lot we shipped at Singapore, in place of some of our own crew who didn't show up. You're welcome to them, if you want them. In fact, I'd rather you took them than any of the rest."

"Good!" cried Kallinger. "That's settled, then. The chief, here, says he'll be very glad to trade, and will come out

in the morning. He says he's got about what I told you to expect—opium, ivory, tobacco. I'd let you have Ching to interpret, but I don't see how we can get along without him inland. Anyway, you've one consolation—you can't very well get the worst of any bargain you make, no matter what it is."

"Oh, never mind about that," returned Seaton. "I'm not very keen on doing anything in the trading line, and especially so since that canoe came alongside. I can't say I like their looks, and I don't fancy the idea of their swarming all over the ship."

"Nonsense," laughed Kallinger. "If we're willing to trust our skins ashore, I don't see that you've anything very much to fear aboard. They can't help their looks, captain."

"No; I suppose not. Anyway, I'm going to limit them to one canoe load aboard at a time. Let Ching Lang tell him so."

"But, look here, captain," protested Kallinger, "that's foolish. To begin by exhibiting distrust is the surest road to trouble; and, on top of that, it'll make it harder for us ashore."

"I'm sorry," insisted Seaton, "but it's got to be that or nothing. If the chief can't see it that way, all I've got to say is that it ought to be a hint to you to look out for yourselves ashore. Let Ching tell him."

"Well, if you feel as strongly as that about it," said Kallinger, yielding, "why, all right. Tell the chief what the captain says, Ching."

"Him say," interpreted Ching, after the exchange of a few words, during which Koru, the chief, held up his hands, counting on his fingers—"him say only high men come 'bloard. Eight, ten. Allee rest allee samee stlay down in bloats."

Seaton nodded. "I didn't think he'd make any objections," he remarked.

"Well, if that's settled," suggested Knapp, "let's get moving. We need all the time we've got."

"I suppose we'd better," agreed Kallinger. "Just a last word, captain. It's understood that you wait here with the *Traymore* for us, no matter how long we're gone."

"She'll be here," said Seaton, turning to go. "And I wish you all kinds of luck."

"One second"—Kallinger detained him—"that's a point I'm coming to. There's a chance we won't have luck; or, rather, we may have bad luck. There's no telling what might happen. If we get into a tight hole and need help, we'll fire a rocket."

"Shore expeditions weren't in the bargain, Mr. Kallinger, and I'm not overanxious for any," replied Seaton; "however, I'll agree to do my best for you."

CHAPTER VI.

At three o'clock in the afternoon, when Kallinger and his companions, together with Ching and four of the crew—the four who had shipped at Singapore—went ashore, long, low-lying banks of dull-gray clouds to the eastward already promised a speedy change in the fair weather that had lasted without interruption during the last few days.

As the afternoon drew on, the weather grew worse, blowing up a high wind, increasing in velocity every hour, with intermittent gusts of heavy rain. The night closed in black as pitch, until a man's figure was scarcely discernible across the width of the deck.

Over the whistling of the wind through the rigging, the constant patter of the rain, now a steady downpour, upon the decks, came the boom and moan of the surf from the eastern shore of the island, growing louder and louder as the storm worked up a sea.

Sheltered in the lagoon, the *Traymore* lay securely, with hardly more motion than if she were at dock. Aboard, the crew were snuggled comfortably in the forecastle, all save the shore watch—one man forward, and Fuller on the bridge.

In the chart room, Seaton and McCrie were seated at the table with a bottle and a set of dominoes.

"Hang the luck!" snorted Seaton good-naturedly at the end of the third

game, flipping his third sovereign at McCrie, who caught the coin deftly, and pocketed it at once.

"The difficulty, Captain Seaton," remarked McCrie, shuffling the dominoes with both hands, and beginning to draw for a new game, "is no' with the luck. 'Tis a natural defect with the Yankees —ye're o'eranxious in your play, Captain Seaton—imprudent and hasty like, d'ye see?"

Seaton laughed. "Sure," said he. "And while you Britishers are sounding mud puddles with a ten-fathom lead to see if they're deep enough to drown you, we jump them and *hustle* for what we're after. Maybe, with your keen powers of observation, Mr. McCrie, you've noticed we usually get there, too. Well, play!"

"Aye; I'll no' say but for a young country ye've made strides," McCrie admitted, with a grin, and triumphantly planked down a domino, face up. "Double five, Captain Seaton—which ye'll note will count ten."

Seaton's rejoinder died before it reached his lips. There was a wild shriek from forward, then shouts and curses, and a hideous chorus of unearthly and soul-sickening yells. He sprang to his feet, and for an instant his eyes met McCrie's. He nodded as though answering the other's unspoken thoughts, and pointed to the revolver rack behind the engineer's head.

"Two apiece, McCrie, and don't forget Fuller," he said coolly, and, wrenching open a drawer of the table, began to fill his pockets with cartridge boxes. "Have a care, McCrie; they're loaded!" he cautioned, as the other jerked the heavy navy revolvers from their clasps and tumbled them, two at a time, upon the table.

"Aye," muttered McCrie grimly; "but we'll be like to empty 'em fast enough. 'Tis fair pandemonium fo'ard —I've suspicions 'twill be the godless heathen."

The door burst open, and Fuller in dripping oilskins stumbled in. "For God's sake, be quick!" he gasped. "They'll be here in a minute. It's those cursed Malays. They boarded for'ard. Didn't see 'em, it's so dark I couldn't see a thing from the bridge. The crew's done for most likely by now. Listen! Listen to that! I just saw one——"

"We'll hold this deck if we can," interrupted Seaton sharply. He flung a box of cartridges to each and picked up a brace of revolvers, motioning the others to do the same. "McCrie, you hold the starboard ladder. Fuller, you keep with me for a minute. Come on!"

From the break of the lower deck, two ladders, one on either side of the ship, led up to the main deck where the chart house was located. Seaton leading, they dashed out, and separated. McCrie going to the right, and Seaton, with Fuller close behind him, going to the left.

Seaton reached the head of the ladder not an instant too soon. Something darker than the blackness of the night loomed before him. Came the sound of quick breathing, the sense of other shapes following fast on the first. His arm shot out with all the strength of his great frame behind it, and the butt of his weapon crashed into soft, quivering resistance. There was a scream of pain. Fuller's revolver roared like a cannon in his ears, almost singeing his hair, as the mate fired over his shoulder.

Across the deck, McCrie's revolvers were cutting the night with long flashes of light, and over the roar of the reports, the savage medley of noises from the lower deck, the little Scotchman's voice rose stridently in fervent blasphemy.

At this sudden and unexpected resistance, the Malays retreated, and for a moment the ladders were clear.

"Fuller," said Seaton quickly, "we can't hold this long. Besides, some of the devils are likely to board by the stern. Our only chance is to lower a boat. Can you manage it alone?"

"I'll manage," replied Fuller between his teeth. "But 'twill take time."

"Quick, then!" Seaton ordered. "Lower the small cutter amidships on the port side—that'll be away from the shore."

"All right," answered Fuller, and disappeared.

Seaton called across to McCrie. "They'll be making a rush in a minute. Look out for yourself. We've got to hold them long enough to give Fuller a chance to lower a boat."

McCrie did not answer. He was whistling through his teeth. Uncanny and grim it sounded over the hush that had fallen, and the tune he whistled was "The Campbells Are Coming," to the accompaniment of empty shells tinkling upon the deck as he emptied the cylinders of his revolvers, reloading with fresh cartridges.

Just the soft shuffling of bare feet, the uneasy sounds of the movements of many men crowded upon the space below, was the only evidence that it was not some horrible nightmare. The shouts and confusion from the direction of the forecastle had died away even before the attack on the upper deck.

Seaton's voice cut through the darkness in a harsh hail: "Thorpe! Peters! Robbins! Jackson! Burnet!" He was shouting the tale of the crew. Not a voice replied to him. "Murdered!" he cried in horror. "Caught like rats! They're out—every last one of them *out!*"

A peal of thunder shook the heavens and died away in a series of long, rumbling rolls like the intermittent firing of artillery. The rain, in a sudden access of fury, poured down in sheets. A flash of lightning cut the sky. For a shuddering instant there flashed before Seaton's eyes half-naked brown and yellow forms, upturned inhuman faces with the stamp of hell upon them, distorted with blood lust and passion unrestrained.

Simultaneously with the flash, a wild yell broke from McCrie's lips, and he fired twice in rapid succession.

"Hold your fire, man!" shouted Seaton. "You'll need every shot you've got to stop their rush—look out!—here they come!"

Whether it was McCrie's shots that stirred them to action, or that the lightning had disclosed the fact that the defenders of the deck above them numbered but two men, their apparent hesitation vanished, and with demoniacal cries the Malays rushed forward, and flung themselves upon the ladders.

The first of the advance on Seaton's side went down before his steady fire, cluttering the lower steps and impeding the movements of those behind. In the momentary check this caused, he peered anxiously in McCrie's direction. The engineer seemed to be holding his own.

Seaton had no time for but a single glance. Clambering over their fallen companions, those behind were coming on with a rush, splitting the air with their bloodcurdling yells. For a moment the narrow ladderway was like a channel of light as Seaton's revolvers streamed fire into the swaying mass before him, and then the hammers snapped upon empty shells.

With a bitter curse, Seaton reversed his weapons to ply the butts in a hand-to-hand conflict. The hot barrels seared his flesh, the pain adding to the blind fury that was now upon him. His arms rose and fell flaillike. His blows went home with crunching, hideous noises. Slowly they were pressing up to the topmost step. He was gasping for breath.

He was conscious that McCrie's fire, too, had ceased, though the sound of the conflict still waging across the deck gave evidence that the plucky little Scotchman still held the ladder. Then suddenly, McCrie's fire broke out anew, footsteps came running toward him, a revolver was thrust into his own hand, and an empty one snatched in exchange.

"Drop the other!" yelled a voice in his ear. "I'll load 'em."

It was Fuller—and in the nick of time.

"Good old Fuller!" panted Seaton. "Take that——" A sinewy arm brandishing a wicked kris just grazed his neck as he leaped back and fired. The kris clattered to the deck, the arm fell back, and its owner pitched over backward, head down.

Seaton, with a laugh of unholy glee, stepped forward—down onto the top-

most step. They slashed at him, cut at him, but the leaders, forced to give back before his attack, were now cramped by the jam of their followers packed in below them.

It was either up or down. Disheartened by Seaton's desperate forcing of the fight, and by the renewed firing that was now picking them off mercilessly at the very moment when they had believed the victory theirs, they gave way sullenly, retreating into the waist of the ship, leaving the ladders clear again save for the bodies of the dead that strewed the steps, and only the kindly darkness withheld from sight a scene that could have been little better than a shambles.

"The boat, Fuller!" gasped Seaton. "The boat, is it launched?"

"Aye, she's ready," replied Fuller, from the starboard ladder where he had joined McCrie.

"This is our chance, then. Steal away quietly, both of you—no noise. It will take them a minute or two to discover we're gone. They've learned caution at all events. Now, then—*quick!*"

As he spoke, Seaton stepped silently back a pace or two from the head of the ladder, and then, turning, moved rapidly along the deck, feeling his way past the chart house, to the davits abaft the bridge. The others were there ahead of him.

"I've made fast the stern tackle," whispered Fuller. "We'll have to shinny down that."

"Away with you, then," said Seaton. "McCrie, go first. You're not hurt, are you?"

"A scratch or two—no more," replied the engineer, mounting the rail. "'Twas perfectly——"

"Hurry, man, hurry!" Seaton cut him short.

McCrie disappeared over the side, and an instant later his voice rose guardedly, announcing his safety.

Fuller followed, and then Seaton. As he dropped into the stern of the cutter, he drew out his clasp knife.

"Cut away in the bow there, McCrie," he ordered, and severed the stern tackle as he spoke.

Fuller was fumbling with the oars.

"Wait, Fuller," whispered Seaton. "Let her drift a spell; we'll go clear of the stern. They can't see us, and I reckon all their craft are around the bows."

They sat still in the boat, listening intently. Though under the protection of the *Traymore's* hull, the wind swept around in little gusts and eddies that gradually blew them clear of the ship. Her outline grew more and more indistinct, finally merging into the surrounding darkness. Fuller in the center seat now carefully ran out his oars.

"'Twas fair grand," murmured McCrie. "Fair grand!"

"Aye," returned Seaton bitterly, "if ten good men murdered with hardly a chance to strike a blow for themselves, and the loss of a ship is grand—'twas grand, McCrie!"

"The fight, man! The fight! Ye know well enough I meant that an' naught else, Captain Seaton!" snapped the engineer quickly. "I'll no' say—losh! They've discovered we're gone!"

A babel of unearthly yells, as though all bedlam were turned loose, broke out astern; and then, looking like will-o'-the wisps flitting hither and thither, lights began to dance around in the darkness, as the Malays scoured the ship from end to end.

"Pull, man, hard," urged Seaton. "They can't hear us now for their own row. Pass an oar forward to McCrie."

McCrie reached for the oar, and then it almost fell from his grasp as the hoarse notes of the *Traymore's* siren rose above the confusion—some one, evidently, had stumbled upon the whistle cord, and was jerking it violently.

The sound roused McCrie as though it had been the sting of a whiplash across his face.

"They'll be down with the machinery presently," he moaned. "There's no' much steam, but enough to do harm. 'Tis all the work of that dirty yellow devil. I misdoubt I got him, but I can't tell. 'Twas at him I fired by the light-

nin' flash, Captain Seaton. I wasn't wastin' charges, I'll have ye know."

"What are you ranting about?" demanded Seaton. "Who was it you fired at?"

"Who was it?" rasped McCrie angrily. "Who was it? 'Twas that sneakin' heathen Ching Lang, an' none else!"

"Ching Lang!" repeated Seaton incredulously.

Fuller stopped rowing, and swung round to stare at McCrie.

"Go on rowing, Fuller; we aren't clear by long odds," reminded Seaton. "Are you sure, McCrie, that it was Ching Lang?"

"Aye, I'm sure. Would I be like to mistaken a face like his? I fired twice, as ye're aware."

"Did you get him?" questioned Seaton quickly.

"I'm hopin' I did," replied McCrie fiercely, "though 'tis against the ethics of the creed—I'm a Presbyterian—to say it. I'm hopin' I did; but I'd no' say for a certainty."

"I hope you did, too," said Seaton fervently, as the remembrance of the open blind and Ching's presence outside the chart-room door the previous night, when he had placed the two thousand pounds beneath the bunk, flashed across his mind.

"If Ching's in this," submitted Fuller, speaking for the first time, "what about Kallinger and his crowd ashore?"

"Murdered probably," answered Seaton grimly. "Murdered before ever the attack on the *Traymore* began. It's plain enough. Ching is hand in glove with the natives, and he's stirred them up to it. If you didn't end him, McCrie, he's the owner by now of the two thousand pounds Kallinger paid me for the trip. That's what he was after, I imagine, and what put him up to start all the deviltry."

"What d'ye mean?" demanded Fuller.

Seaton related the events of the preceding night. "Ching saw me put the money under the bunk," he ended; "there's no question about that now."

Fuller swore, and dug his oar viciously into the water. "I don't know how it strikes you," he growled; "but it strikes me that we're in a number-one-size mess!"

CHAPTER VII.

For a period of ten minutes Fuller and McCrie pulled steadily at their oars, and no one in the boat spoke. Then Seaton bade them stop to listen. The uproar aboard the *Traymore* still reached them distinctly enough, but there was no sound of pursuit.

"Do you hear anything?" he asked the others.

"No," replied Fuller, after a moment. "It's queer, too; for I figured they'd be after us with their canoes. They're bound to have seen the tackles hangin' loose from the davits."

"I rather expected they would myself," agreed Seaton; "but I guess they calculate we won't be able to get away very far, and that they'll get us at their own convenience."

"Blimy!" muttered Fuller. "I guess they ain't far wrong at that. We're in a tight hole, anyway you look at it."

"We've been in tight holes before, Fuller," Seaton reminded him cheerfully, "and I've a notion we'll get out of this one."

"Would ye have formulated a plan, captain, by any chance?" inquired McCrie.

"There's only one thing I see to do," Seaton answered. "Steering by the lights on the *Traymore*, I've been heading as nearly as I can for the far end of the lagoon. I didn't get much of a look through the glass coming in this noon, but from what I saw I don't think it's very far across to the shore of the island. But, far or near, we'll have to cross it, carry the boat, and make for that other island out there."

McCrie protested. "Man, she'd never live with the sea that's on. Hark to the surf, Captain Seaton."

"I fancy we'll have time enough to consider that," returned Seaton dryly. "If we're across by daybreak, we'll be in luck. If the sea is running too heavy then, we'll have to lay up, hide, wait, and take our chances. Give way, both

of you. The sooner we're out of this the better."

The oars dipped obediently. It was five minutes before Seaton spoke again.

"Fuller," he asked suddenly, "have we any stores aboard?"

"Water, an' a few biscuits in the locker," replied the mate tersely.

"Good!" said Seaton, and relapsed into silence.

The few twinkling lights from the *Traymore* grew dimmer and dimmer. Ahead was just utter blackness, like a wall of inky hue. It was still raining as heavily as ever, and they seemed to be getting a little more of the sweep of the wind. Already wet to the skin, except Fuller, who was protected by his oilskins, the gusts that blew the drops with stinging force into their faces could add but little to their discomfort.

They had been pulling steadily for some twenty minutes, when suddenly the boat grounded with a shock that flung them from their seats.

"Out!" cried Seaton, as he recovered himself. "Out! Ashore with you, and haul her up." He shivered a little as he spoke, though the air was hot, scarce cooled by the storm. "Fever," he muttered, "if we're not careful—and neither quinine nor brandy to stave it off."

"Ah, but there is," soothed McCrie. "I've a wee drop of the last, an' if ye'll drink light there's no tellin' but 'twill go round again."

McCrie's caution was not to be despised, for his stock was slender indeed, but little as each man took, it acted as a tonic upon them.

"Come on, now; up with her!" cried Seaton encouragingly.

They lifted the boat bodily, and carried it over the sand. Twenty yards from the water's edge, where the trees and vegetation fringed the beach, they set it down.

"What's to do now?" demanded Fuller.

"Do!" cried Seaton. "There's nothing to do but go ahead, or wait here and get our throats slit in the morning. It can't be more than half a mile across. The undergrowth is not overthick, and we can do it all right in easy stages."

They tackled it manfully, with set teeth and muscles that quivered with exquisite pain under the strain, stumbling, falling, banging into trees, tripping over trailing tendons, hurt, sore, bruised from head to foot, but ever the clear grit and unfaltering determination of Seaton urged them on. At the end of two heartbreaking hours, they had made no more than a quarter of a mile.

Seaton himself, though stronger than his companions, was about exhausted, and a prolonged halt was necessary. But, to his relief, he knew that he had overestimated the distance that lay ahead of them—the boom and roar of the surf sang pleasantly near in his ears. Another half hour would see them through. They could take an hour's lay-off, and still make it before it grew light.

"One more heave," he called, "and make it a good one. Then we'll rest for an hour, and grub. Biscuits and water aren't so bad—when you've nothing else. Now, then!"

"Wait!" cried McCrie suddenly, as they stooped over the boat to lift it. "What's yon?"

"Where?" asked Seaton and Fuller in unison.

McCrie pulled Seaton a little to one side of where he had been standing, and pointed through the trees.

"There! D'ye see now?" he whispered excitedly.

Not more than forty yards away was the glimmer of a light.

"Blimy!" exclaimed Fuller. "It's like enough we're runnin' plum into another of their dashed villages like the one we was anchored off from, for all that murderin' heathen said there was only one."

"I don't think so. It looks like a camp fire to me," declared Seaton. "We'll go forward and see, anyhow."

"But we'll never be able to find the boat again in the dark, if we leave it," objected Fuller.

"Maybe not. I guess you're right. Well, then, you stay here, Fuller, and McCrie can come halfway with me.

That'll string us out and keep us in touch. Come along, McCrie."

The wind and rain were now in their favor, drowning out as it did the sound of their advance. Halfway, as they had arranged, McCrie stopped, and Seaton went on alone.

As he drew nearer, he moved with the utmost caution, feeling his way from tree trunk to tree trunk, and testing his footing carefully before trusting his weight upon it. And then, in the perversity of things, and just as another step would have given him the position of vantage he was seeking, he slipped, and, with a desperate but fruitless effort to recover himself, pitched forward with a crash.

"Halt! Who goes there?" There was a sharp, metallic click, the smart slap of the shoulder strap against the barrel as of a carbine thrown hurriedly to the "present."

Seaton was on his feet in a moment. It seemed as though he had never heard so heavenly a voice before. A wild thought flashed across his mind that it was Kallinger and his companions—that they, too, had escaped. He pushed forward——

"Halt!" came the command again, this time with a harsher, sharper ring. "Halt, or I fire!"

Then Seaton found his voice. "Don't fire!" he shouted. "It's all right, whoever you are." He broke through the trees into the circle of light. "By the holy Jehosaphat!" he exclaimed. "A British marine! Ho, McCrie, pass the word to Fuller, and come on. It's all right."

There were hasty, hurried movements as of those suddenly alarmed, and, where there had been but one before, the place was now alive with men. The marine's carbine was still stolidly leveled at Seaton's head.

"What's wrong there, sentry?" sang out a voice sharply from the darkness behind.

"Prisoner, sir," was the marine's curt response.

"Sergeant, get a light"—the authoritative voice was again speaking—"and bring him in here."

"Prisoner nothing!" snorted Seaton in disgust. "I'm an American, you idiots. Here, keep your hands off!" He shook away a couple of men who had grasped his arms. "I'll go to your commander peacefully enough—I could fall on his neck for joy, for that matter. I've a couple of men behind there, whom I'll thank you not to perforate as they come up. Ahoy, there, Fuller! McCrie!" he called again.

"Comin', man, comin' "—it was the Scotchman's voice—"but the walkin's no' perfect!"

The floundering and thrashing of the men in the thicket, in their evident haste to join their commander, bore eloquent testimony to the engineer's words.

"Well, sergeant! What the devil's up there?" The interrogation was full of angry impatience.

"It's all right, sir, I guess," replied the man at Seaton's elbow. "There's three of 'em. English, sir; though they're hard-looking tickets."

McCrie and Fuller had by now arrived, and stood blinking in the firelight. The words roused the fiery little Scotchman.

"Ye're not asked for your opinion, ye forsaken, pipe-clayin' image!" he snapped aggressively. "I'll have ye know 'twill be well for ye to keep your tongue in your cheeks to your betters!"

"Shut up, McCrie!" said Seaton. "The man's perfectly right. We can't look much less than scarecrows. Go on, sergeant, lead the way."

The sergeant hesitated a moment, seemingly tempted to bring matters to a more intimate issue with McCrie, but a wholesome regard for the impatience of his officer evidently made him think better of it.

"This way!" he growled. "Jenkins, Harris, Smithers, fall in as guard!"

As they stepped forward, McCrie plucked at Seaton's sleeve. "I'm distressed at doubtin' Kallinger an' his lot, poor devils," he whispered. "Man, 'twill be the British expedition we've run foul of."

Seaton started. "Holy sailor!" he muttered, under his breath.

A few steps brought them to a rude,

hastily constructed, brush shelter, in which a ship's lantern was burning. Here the sergeant halted and saluted.

A tall, slim, young man, his oilskins unbuttoned, displaying the naval uniform beneath, was standing at the entrance. Behind him was another man who, dimly seen in the shadows, appeared to be short, thickset, stout; evidently a civilian.

At sight of the naval officer, a grim smile crossed Seaton's lips.

"You're English, you say?" demanded the officer sharply.

"Personally, I'm an American," corrected Seaton coolly. "The others are——"

"Sergeant, let your men turn in," ordered the officer, apparently satisfied, and abruptly breaking in on Seaton's explanation. Then, as the marines withdrew, he motioned the three inside.

"Now, then," he said curtly, "you're no doubt from that ship that came into the lagoon this afternoon. What in bally time are you doing picnicking around ashore a night like this?"

"Picnickin'!" McCrie repeated the word softly, rolling it on his tongue as though it embodied a world of infinite delight.

"Also," went on the officer, "I'm dashed curious to know what your ship touched here for anyway."

For a moment Seaton did not reply, turning the matter over in his mind. If Kallinger and the others were dead, as he firmly believed they must be, their confidence was still to be respected, for their secret was the secret of the French government, as well. On top of this was his own position. To admit the truth was practically to disclose themselves in arms against——

"Well!" prompted the officer suspiciously, breaking in on his thoughts. "Why don't you answer?"

"I'll answer your last question first," replied Seaton, his mind made up. "We touched here to trade."

"Trade, eh? I suppose you've been here before, then?"

"No," said Seaton, falling blindly into the other's trap.

"Perhaps you'll explain, then, how you navigated that channel so handily. We watched you come in this afternoon." The words were sharp as the cut of a knife. "You may have imagined I didn't recognize you, Captain Seaton. I've a good memory for faces, even under a poor light. Your engineer, McCrie I believe is the name, would be a good signpost in any event. You, Fuller, I saw ashore at Singapore."

"My own memory's not over poor, Lieutenant Powell," returned Seaton imperturbably. "The last time, and the second it was, I had the pleasure of seeing you was at 'Marquez. You were recovering from brain fever, and the hallucination—which I trust is dissipated—that we'd run a cargo of contraband arms for the Boers."

"Yes," said Powell grimly; "and perhaps *you'll* recall, too, that I warned you to look out for the third time. You can hardly expect me to believe your story—your reputation doesn't lean toward trading—not of this kind. You'll be better off to tell the truth."

"We came in *trading,*" repeated Seaton smoothly; "take it, or leave it. As for the channel, a Chink we picked up at Singapore acted as pilot. The reason we're ashore to-night is that that same Chink trapped us. He went ashore with a landing party this afternoon—God help them!—and to-night in the storm he boarded us with a gang of those bloody pirates from the village at his back. They were aboard before we knew it. The crew, penned in the forecastle, were murdered like a lot of sheep. We made our escape, rowed down the lagoon, and landed. Since then, we've been breaking our hearts and back totting our boat along, intending to launch her on this side, once the sea is down, and make for that other island out yonder."

There was a pause before Powell replied. "I don't know whether to believe you or not, and you might as well know it," he said bluntly, at last.

"You'll find our boat a few yards back in the bush, if you'll take the trouble to look!" Seaton burst out angrily. "Do we look as though we were here for *fun!* We've had to run for our lives,

I tell you, and we're about all in. You're a hospitable cuss, and you can go to the devil!"

Powell stared coolly, and shrugged his shoulders. "I believe you're in trouble—you look it," he said quietly, "and we'll stand by you there; but I do *not* believe your trading yarn. There are particular circumstances which make your presence here with your ship suspicious. Her reputation, backed by the word of a man who was broken at the United States Naval Academy isn't generally taken at par."

At the words the blood fled from Seaton's cheeks, and he stood pale as a piece of marble. He took a quick step toward the other, and his fist clenched.

"Don't go too far, Powell!" he said hoarsely; then, as suddenly as he had advanced, he stepped back again with a bitter laugh. "You're right. I *was* kicked out, disowned by my country, if you like. It's none of your business—nor what I've done since that's earned me the reputation of a freebooter. It's been clean work—clean, Powell, do you understand!—and big stakes—success or a fusillade—to make life worth hanging onto. Sometimes I've even dared to float the Stars and Stripes; but, by Heaven! I'll have you know I've never disgraced them, though it's five years since I put a foot on American soil."

"It's five years too long, my son—five years too long!" The stout man had suddenly brushed by Powell, and was extending both his hands. "Jack Seaton! Jack Seaton! My boy! My boy!"

"You, sir—Senator Wilton!" mumbled Seaton, hardly knowing what he was saying. "It's not you, sir, here, really!"

CHAPTER VIII.

Seaton's mind was in a daze. He was trying to persuade himself that it was not all a dream. A United States senator, and that one Wilton, the man who had been a second father to him, here on a wild, and almost unknown island of the Malay Archipelago! The man he had not seen since that day five years ago when——

Senator Wilton was speaking again, and the words were burning into Seaton's brain.

"Your record is clear, my boy; *clear*, do you understand? Your classmate, Trevor, was fatally wounded in a gun-practice accident soon after he graduated, and he confessed before he died. Your record is clear, Jack. We tried over and over again to get track of you, and couldn't. Powell, it was I who procured Jack's appointment to the academy. What happened was a miserable story best left untold, save Jack's part in it. He sacrificed his career, shouldered the disgrace, and went out a dishonored man to shield a classmate."

"By Jove!" said Powell, in genuine admiration. "Seaton, here's my hand, will you take it? I'm sorry I flicked you on the raw like that."

Seaton was too stunned and bewildered almost to understand. "It's all right," he said to Powell incoherently. "All right."

The little Scotchman's bony fingers gripped his like a vise. "Man, but I'm glad, I'm glad," he cried heartily.

Fuller's handclasp was no less eloquent.

"I don't care what brought you here, Jack," the senator was saying, "or what the purpose of your visit to this island is. It is sufficient that I can say, thank God, I've found you at last! And now I know that Lieutenant Powell, who is here on my behalf, will be only too glad to have me explain the reason of *our* presence, which must seem very strange indeed to you."

Powell nodded. "I guess I've had the wrong focus on you, Seaton," he said, pointing to a roll of rubber sheeting in the corner. "Spread out that cloth, and sit down."

Fuller rolled it out, and the three squatted upon it, gratefully accepting Powell's flask, which he handed out. The other two resumed their places on the blankets, where they had been lying when disturbed by the sentry's challenge.

"Jack, do you remember my daughter, Betty?" the senator began abruptly.

"Little Betty? Remember her!"

"Not so little now. Indeed, God knows——" His voice broke and he stopped. "A fortnight ago," he went on, regaining control of himself, "she disappeared. Kidnaped. We have reason to believe that she is on this island."

"Betty here! On this island!" Seaton was on his feet, savage fury in his face. "How? I don't understand!"

"We were down here for a year's cruise in my yacht, my wife, daughter, and a party of friends, and had put in at Surabaya on the Java coast. Betty, as you know, was always much given to athletics and outdoor exercises, and we had aboard a light skiff especially designed for her to use when we were in harbor. Surabaya, I need hardly explain to you, is at the mouth of the Kediri River. One evening, two weeks ago to-day to be exact, she started for a row up the river, and—and that was the last we have seen of her. The boat was found about half a mile up, hidden back in the bushes on the right bank. Her mother was almost crazy with anxiety, and we feared at first Betty had been drowned. The finding of the boat, pulled up a distance inland, disproved that theory, and we knew then that there had been foul play.

"I shall not attempt to more than sketch the details of what followed. There was a demand for ransom. One million dollars. The local police believed it to be the work of the *orang-laut,* the sea robbers. They caught a Malay they believed to be implicated, and, under pressure, he confessed. He said the plot was hatched by a pirate leader, a Chinese named Hoh Yuan, whose lair was on this island of Sampi. I cabled our consul general at Singapore, and, through his good offices, the British government generously placed the gunboat *Ajax,* under command of Lieutenant Powell, at my disposal. He picked me up at Surabaya, and—and it's my little girl, Jack—my little girl. Powell will tell you the rest."

Seaton's eyes were flashing, and his fists were clenched. "The devils!" he muttered fiercely. "The——"

"We stood in just before dawn this morning"—Powell took up the tale—"and anchored the *Ajax* behind that island out there, so that she would be hidden from sight here. It's very much smaller than this, and is not inhabitated, so far as our landing party could discover. They reported seeing you come in this afternoon. Our idea was to effect a landing on this island without being seen, find out where Miss Wilton was being kept, and trust to a surprise attack to rescue her.

"The storm aided us with the first part of our plan, as it grew dark early in the evening before the sea was running too heavy to hinder us any in landing. I brought the *Ajax* around, debarked twenty-five men, and sent her back to her anchorage. We soon found, however, that we could make no headway in the darkness, and, as our object of effecting a landing unknown to the islanders was accomplished, we decided to camp, and wait for daylight before moving forward. From the information supplied by the Malay that Senator Wilton has referred to, this Hoh Yuan has his stronghold somewhere between those two hills you will have noticed as you stood in."

Seaton leaned suddenly forward.

"Lieutenant Powell," said he, "will you give me your word as an officer and a gentleman that this is the *sole* reason for your being here?"

Powell stared. "Why, of course, I will!" he exclaimed. "What do you mean?"

"Nothing," muttered Seaton, and looked at McCrie and Fuller. Both men were sitting straight up, a queer look on their faces.

McCrie shook his head. "It's no' that, Captain Seaton. It had nothin' to do with the lass. There wouldn't be time."

"How soon did you sail from Singapore after the cable was received from Senator Wilton, lieutenant?" asked Seaton quickly.

"The cable came in at noon. We sailed at four," replied Powell.

McCrie wagged his head. "'Twasn't that, at any rate. Let be, man. They've paid for it with their lives, whether

they told the truth or no'—'tis little odds."

"What is the matter, Jack?" put in Senator Wilton. "To whom are you referring?"

"I'll tell you what I can, sir, and still preserve the confidence that I'm bound to keep. Lieutenant Powell was right when he said my ship wasn't down here trading. We were chartered by three men to come here. For a moment, the suspicion crossed my mind that they were concerned in some way with Miss Betty's abduction, but the time of the news reaching Singapore and the *Ajax's* sailing disproves that. We didn't sail for twenty-four hours after she did. I guess they were straight enough, poor devils, and, as McCrie says, whether their story was true or false, they've probably paid for it with their lives. They went ashore this afternoon with four of the crew, and that Chinaman, Ching Lang, who led the attack on the *Traymore* to-night. They were probably murdered in cold blood, as the rest of my crew were. As far as I am concerned, I give you my assurance upon my honor that their object, as they stated it to me, was one upon which they had every right from their standpoint to be engaged."

"I believe you, Jack," said the senator simply.

"So do I," chimed in Powell, "and you've certainly been through a night of it. It will be breaking light in another hour or so, and you chaps had better get what little sleep you can, for we'll leave camp the minute we can see to move. Did you say you had carried your boat over here?"

"Pretty nearly. It's back there a few yards in the bush, as I told you," Seaton replied.

"That's rather bad, I'm afraid," muttered Powell. "They'll take up the search for you in the morning, find where you landed on the shore of the lagoon, and track you to the boat. After that, they'll find this camp, and the game of hide and seek will be all up."

"No," said Seaton slowly, shaking his head. "I don't think so. In the first place, they don't know which direction we took after leaving the *Traymore*. In the second place, the rain will have washed out all the tracks on the beach long before this, and we were careful to carry, not drag, the boat across the sand. The boat is too far away from the beach to have them find it unless they stumble upon it by accident. My idea is that, not finding it anywhere around the shore, they'll believe we risked the channel and the open sea. They may search around out there a bit, but that's all. That's the way it looks to me, lieutenant."

"By Jove, I believe you're right," agreed Powell. "We'll risk it, anyway. You haven't any idea, Seaton, I suppose, how many of these devils there are on the island, have you?"

"There's a swarm of them," Seaton answered savagely. "That village on the lagoon alone is a husky-sized one—what's in the interior, I don't know."

"Well, there's no use borrowing trouble," said Powell; "and we'll have to take things as we find them. Once we've placed Miss Wilton, we can decide on the rest. You're anxious about your ship, of course."

"That can wait," replied Seaton grimly.

"'Tis no' likely they'll be able to move her, at any rate," put in McCrie; "though 'tis fair heartbreakin' to think of the state the machinery'll be in."

"Well, we'll have her back before we're through, and we'll disinfect this pest hole with shell, once Miss Wilton is safe," concluded Powell. "Now, get your sleep."

CHAPTER IX.

Physically exhausted as he was, Seaton could not sleep. McCrie and Fuller, stretched out beside him, lay like logs. Across the shelter, Powell's regular, heavy breathing announced that he, too, was deep in slumber. Only the senator tossed fretfully in an uneasy, fitful doze, occasionally moaning, and muttering broken words.

Seaton lay on his back, his hands clasped behind his head, staring out through the opening. The rain had

ceased. The only sounds now were the patter of the drops as the wind shook them from the leaves and branches. The storm had spent itself. Overhead, here and there, the black clouds were breaking into lighter patches. Sleep was an impossibility. The restless activity of his brain carried him along with irresistible force through a series of events and happenings, reaching back over the last five years.

The old days at the academy! His name was clear at last! None knew the bitterness that had been his. Came the picture of a white-hulled, trim-rigged cruiser in a little harbor in the South Sea Isles one summer's evening as he had steamed slowly past and out to sea. On the quarter-deck the white figure of the watch officer—perhaps a man he had known—known intimately and well. The band, playing some medley, had crashed suddenly into the strains of "Yankee Doodle." It was all a blur. The folds of Old Glory drooping from the stern he had seen through a blinding mist and wet eyes. He remembered his hand had gone to the old-time salute, and then he had hidden himself behind the weather cloth of his bridge. Now he could hold up his head among them again! Trevor was dead and——

His thoughts flew off at a tangent. A brown-eyed—great, glorious, wonderful eyes they were—brown-haired little girl in short frocks. His "little comrade," he used to call her. The senator's home had been almost his home. She was fifteen then. Twenty now. Twenty now, and a woman. A *woman*—among these wretches! Great beads of sweat sprang to his forehead. A paroxysm of fury, wild, ungovernable, swept over him. It passed; but stamped upon his features was an expression it was not good to see—the same look, grim, merciless, that had been there a few hours before when he had faced death a dozen times fighting desperately for his life on the *Traymore's* upper deck.

Ching's treachery, the murder of his men, the loss of his ship, Kallinger, and his friends, his own escape, surged upon him in incoherent fragments of thought. He tried to puzzle it out, but somehow the pieces would not fit. Over and over in his mind he revolved the matter. Suddenly he half raised himself to his elbow, and uttered an exclamation. Was this it? Was this the solution of it all? *Ching, trusted by Kallinger, had brought them to the wrong island!*

Yes, surely, that was it. It would account for it all. He sank back again, and closed his eyes. The malignant, grinning, yellow features swam before them. He wondered if McCrie had missed—to fire by a flash of lightning is an uncertain shot at best. He opened his eyes again. A dark form blocked the entrance.

"Five o'clock, sir," said a voice; "an' it's just growin' light."

"Right!" responded Powell, instantly aroused, springing to his feet.

But neither McCrie nor Fuller moved, and Seaton was obliged to shake them roughly before they stirred. He was sore and stiff as he rose to his own feet. The bruises he had received in carrying the boat, together with a slight slash or two, mementos of the fight, were not allayed by his wet clothing, even yet scarcely dry. He was chilled, and went to the doorway swinging his arms to stimulate the circulation.

"The storm is over, isn't it, Jack?" Senator Wilton was at his elbow.

"Yes, sir. We'll have it hot by noon," Seaton answered cheerfully.

"I—I am impatient to go ahead. It was very hard to remain inactive all last night." There was a pathetic, pleading ring in the tones, and the words came slowly.

Seaton turned quickly. The dim light accentuated the other's haggard face—the white hair adding a pitiful touch. Senator Wilton looked like a broken man.

Here was one whose trouble was far greater than his own. Seaton's hand, in instinctive sympathy, found the elder man's shoulder.

"You mustn't worry, senator," he said cheerfully. "I know it must have been hard, but Powell did the best thing. If he had pushed forward in the dark,

he would probably have stumbled onto something that would have given the game away. It's bound to come out right, sir; you'll see."

The senator smiled sadly. "Thank you, my boy," he said simply, and went back inside.

"Betty!" whispered Seaton through gritted teeth, and his fists clenched. "Betty!"

The camp was astir. About him the men passed to and fro, hurriedly but with quiet movements, preparing the morning meal—a brown-tanned, sturdy lot, infusing him with confidence and respect. He watched them until Powell summoned him to breakfast.

The meal ended quickly—no one seemed much in the mood for talk—and presently Powell announced that they were ready to start. As the men fell into rank, he gave them a few hurried instructions.

"Single file, lads, at three paces; and be careful to watch your footing. We must make as little noise as possible. Senator, we'll place you in the middle of the line, please. Seaton, you and your men can fall in behind me. Are you ready? Forward!"

Leading the column, Powell headed straight into the bush, Seaton following close in his rear, and behind him again McCrie, and then Fuller.

It still lacked half an hour to sunrise, and the eastern glow penetrated the woods with only a dim, uncertain light, making the progress both difficult and slow.

"I'm steering by compass," exclaimed Powell, in a low voice, over his shoulder. "Hoh Yuan's place ought to be about northeast. Unless we meet clearings and have to make detours to keep out of sight, we'll head straight for it."

They moved steadily along, picking their way carefully. The pace, tediously slow, increasing a little, however, as it grew lighter.

At the end of an hour, Powell again called over his shoulder: "We've done about two miles, wouldn't you say?"

"About that," agreed Seaton. "Look here, I was thinking it wouldn't be a bad plan to halt for a few minutes, and shinny up one of these trees for the sake of the perspective."

"Bully idea! Pass the word back to halt, and I'll send up one of the men."

"No; I'll go up myself," said Seaton, and, picking out what appeared to be the tallest tree about him, he swung himself quickly into the lower branches.

Five minutes' climbing took him as nearly to the top as he dared to venture his weight. Here he found that the few small branches above him impeded his view. He wriggled cautiously a few feet higher, pushing them aside, and an exclamation of satisfaction escaped him.

To the right of the line of march, and some three miles in the rear, lay the lagoon, and beyond again the open sea. The surface of the lagoon was dotted with little black objects, presumably the Malays' canoes, all apparently making for the same point, around which already a number of them appeared to be clustered. As nearly as Seaton could judge, it was the channel through which the *Traymore* had entered; certainly it was not the spot where he, McCrie, and Fuller had landed. So far, then, they were safe. The *Traymore,* lying close inshore, was hidden by the intervening woods, and he could not get a glimpse of her.

Ahead, in the direction in which they were traveling, the woods stretched out unbrokenly, though rising perceptibly to meet the slopes of the two hills that made the center of the island. From where he clung to the treetop, these two hills lay obliquely before him, and following the course they had been pursuing since leaving the camp they would hit squarely on the valley between the two.

His glance came back again wistfully to the point where he knew the *Traymore* must lie, but his only reward was the sight of a few curls of smoke rising from the village on the shore of the lagoon. He descended the tree, and reported to Powell.

Powell nodded approvingly as he listened.

"I fancy you were right about the beggars not finding the boat. We seem

to be heading all right, and we'll keep straight on," he declared.

They took up the march again.

When they stopped at noon, they were on the skirts of the first hill. Around this, and not more than half a mile ahead, they would enter the valley. Somewhere nestling between the two hills must lie Hoh Yuan's village.

As they ate their rations, they held a council of war.

"We can't be more than half a mile away," said Powell. "I think the best thing to do is to send a small scouting party forward, before we go any farther."

"Well, I'll volunteer," offered Seaton. "Three will be enough. McCrie and Fuller here can come with me, if it's agreeable to you."

"I don't see any objection," replied Powell, a little hesitantly, "only——"

"Never mind hunting for one, then," broke in Seaton, laying his hand, with a smile, on Powell's knee. "We'll go."

Senator Wilton looked up. "I should like to go, too," he said.

"No, sir; I think you'd better not," Seaton answered kindly. "We'll probably have some tough scrambling to do, and may even have to run for it, for that matter."

"I'll absolutely have to forbid that, sir," declared Powell. "I'm responsible in a way for your safety, sir, you know. I tried to urge him to stay aboard the *Ajax*," he explained, turning to Seaton, "but he wouldn't have it."

"I should say *not!*" burst out the senator. "With my little girl here in the power——"

"I can understand your feelings, sir, and your anxiety," said Seaton quickly; "but frankly, you wouldn't help us any by coming."

"Very well, then," conceded the senator resignedly. "I suppose you know best."

As they went on with their dinner, they continued to discuss the plan of attack. The consensus of opinion seemed to be that, once the girl's hiding place was discovered, they should work up to it as closely as possible, then wait for night, and surround it under cover of darkness. It seemed the best, and, indeed, the only course to pursue.

"Aye," said McCrie, wagging his head, "I make no doubt 'twill work; but afterward, lieutenant, have ye thought of that? 'Tis a long walk to the beach, an' a fair bit of a swim to the *Ajax*."

"Yes," replied Powell grimly, "I've thought of that. The *Ajax* will stand in each night, and we've rockets. If these devils had wind there was a gunboat here, we never could hope to get Miss Wilton alive. A landing party and a surprise attack is the only chance. The *Ajax* can't help us until we get back to the beach—and there's only one way to get there—*fight!*"

"Man," wheezed McCrie, and his little, wizened face puckered up until it looked a network of wrinkles, "man, I could love ye like a brother for that!"

CHAPTER X.

Half an hour later, Seaton, McCrie, and Fuller were pushing forward alone into the bush. For some time they had been steadily climbing, the ground rising steeper and steeper; now they seemed to have topped a ridge, and began to descend.

Seaton, who was leading, halted suddenly and drew back, motioning the others to keep silent. After listeneing a moment, he got down on his hands and knees, and, with a sign to the engineer and mate to imitate his example and follow him, began to crawl through the undergrowth. Five yards farther on he stopped, and, as his companions came up beside him, pointed ahead. Before them lay a broad, well-beaten track.

"It's the road from the lagoon to this Hoh Yuan's nest," he whispered. "I thought there must be one somewhere. Listen!"

From the direction of the valley ahead came the sound of many voices and the movement of many feet. The sounds kept drawing nearer and nearer. Seaton and the other two edged farther back from the pathway, and lay well hidden, peering out.

The track bent sharply just before them, and around this bend there now

appeared a half-naked Malay bearing a huge load on his head; behind him came another, and others behind the second again—an interminable procession—each carrying a burden, sometimes two or three sharing it together if, in the case of a chest Seaton noticed, it appeared to be particularly heavy or too clumsy of shape for one man to manage alone.

They swung, laughing and chattering, by the spot where Seaton and his companions lay hidden. Seaton counted them as they went by. Fifty-three.

The Malays had passed, and were well out of sight before any of the three spoke. Fuller was the first.

"Blimy!" he exclaimed. "It looks like they were movin'!"

Seaton stared down the path where the last of the Malays had vanished, a puzzled frown on his face.

"What do you make of it, McCrie?" he asked.

"I'd no' venture an opinion," was the cautious rejoinder; "but"—shrewdly—"I'm thinkin' there'll be less men by fifty-odd to reckon with in the locality we're makin' for."

"You're right!" said Seaton instantly. "Fuller, you make back to Lieutenant Powell, tell him him what we've seen, and tell him to bring the force up here. Be careful to keep them well back from the path as you come up. It will be an hour before you're back, and, in the meantime, McCrie and I will go ahead again. We'll probably return before you do, but if not you must wait for us, for we must know where to find you. Understand?"

"Aye," Fuller nodded. "I can do it an' back in about an hour. Look out for yourselves." And, rising to his feet, he disappeared in the woods.

"We'll go up parallel with the path to that turn yonder," said Seaton, when Fuller had gone. "Come on."

Moving with even greater caution than they had exercised before, they made their way to a point opposite the bend Seaton had indicated. Here, they crawled again to the edge of the path.

McCrie whistled softly under his breath. From where they lay, the track could be seen dipping in a steep grade, straight down to a wide clearing some hundred yards below. Around the clearing were a number of huts, and in the center a long, low-lying, grass-thatched building, apparently constructed of felled trees. An air of desertion pervaded the place. Indeed, apart from a few native women who moved about the compound, the village showed no signs of life whatever.

"You were right enough, McCrie," declared Seaton. "I believe the place is cleaned out of the male population. It's safe to say they were going to the lagoon, because there's no other place they could go. If that's so, we've a couple of hours, at least. It's up to us to get down there, and see if we can find Miss Wilton. We ought to be able to manage it. Powell will be up in an hour, and then with luck we can all be taking the back track long before those devils get back."

Five minutes found them at the edge of the clearing. They struck off to one side and, creeping as close in as they dared, began to skirt around the side of the village, which appeared to be built in the form of an oblong, the rows of huts being two deep, the first row fronting on the clearing, the second standing some ten yards back from the first. At the expiration of a quarter of an hour they had reached the upper end. Once or twice they had heard native voices and had seen a few women, but that was all.

"This will never do," whispered Seaton. "We're not getting anywhere at all."

"If we could lay hands on one of the creatures," suggested McCrie, "we might squeeze a wee bit information out of her."

Seaton shook his head. "All you'd squeeze would be a few screams that would settle our game for keeps; besides, we couldn't understand what she said even if we made her talk. From the size of it, I should say that's Hoh Yuan's hut ahead there. We'll get up as close to it as we can, and see if there's anything doing. If we only knew where thy've got Miss Wilton!

McCrie, we've *got* to find her somehow. We'll never have another chance like this."

The hut Seaton referred to was nearly three times the size of any of the others. It was set farther back, and occupied a position in the center at the head of the clearing. As they approached, voices were raised in angry altercation.

Seaton and McCrie stopped as though they had been shot, and stared into each other's eyes. Stupefaction, amazement, bewilderment was stamped upon their faces, to be replaced almost instantly with a grimmer look—merciless and cold.

"My neck's worth more to me than all the loot in the archipelago, I tell you!" roared a voice. "If I'd known about this girl business, I'd never have moved a finger."

"No more would I; but that's no reason for playing the fool now we *are* here. We'll have the loading done day after to-morrow. What's to happen between now and then? Who's to know she's here?"

"Hoh Yuan no likee have go without load. Girl allee samee slafe. Blimeby get ransom, then mabbe girl go—mabbe not. No can tell——"

"Shut up!" snarled the first speaker. "Don't be too sure about not knowing she's here. Curse it, I tell you this will stir up the fireworks from one end of the archipelago to the other, and there's going to be hell to pay with nothing to pay it with!"

"That's Knapp," whispered Seaton tensely, "and the other's Kallinger! Good Heaven! What does it mean?"

"I'm thinkin'," gritted McCrie. "I no hit the yellow devil—yon's Ching Lang!"

"But we didn't have anything to do with the girl." It was Kallinger's voice continuing the argument.

"And what's that got to do with it?" returned Knapp, in sneering tones. "Girl or no girl, if we're found here after what's happened we'll decorate the gallows, and you know it! If the prospect pleases you, it don't me! There's the murder of the crew, and, thanks to Ching's cursed mess of it, Seaton, the mate, and that sour-faced, sniffling Scotchman escaped to tell the tale."

"God forgive me for sayin' it, I'm a Presbyterian, but——" McCrie was muttering. Seaton's hand closed restrainingly on his shoulder.

"Why, you fool!" retorted Kallinger, "they wouldn't suspect us if they have. They'll think we were massacred probably before the attack began on themselves. As for getting away, Ching here says they searched the lagoon this morning, and there's no sign of their boat. They must have put out by the channel. You ought to know, being a sailor, that no boat could have lived in the sea that was running last night, or even this morning. If I didn't think they were drowned, I wouldn't feel so easy myself—not for your reason, but because they'd be likely to contest the ownership of the *Traymore* if they ever turned up. No one else could—she's neither registered at Lloyd's nor known to the underwriters. You know that because you know that's why we picked her out for our meat. She's like a stray cat—only more valuable. In case, however, they did escape, we'll take the precaution to change her with a little paint and scare up a new name; but what's the use of talking; they're food for the fishes by now, and so's that two thousand pounds—of counterfeit notes! Ha! Ha!" Kallinger's voice rose jeeringly.

"Ye're dislocatin' my shoulder," groaned McCrie. "Let go, man!"

Seaton's hand, still on the other's shoulder, had tightened unconsciously, as he listened, into a viselike grip. Now he loosened his hold without turning his head, and strained intently forward to miss nothing of the conversation.

"Mloney no good?" The tones were both anxious and incredulous.

"Not a single picayune," asserted Kallinger.

Here followed a burst of gruff laughter from Kallinger that lasted for fully a minute, intermingled with voluble, high-pitched execrations from the Chinaman.

"Say, Knapp!" cried Kallinger, after a moment, "wouldn't that jar you! The blamed heathen thought they were good, and has stolen the bogus notes. It's the first time I ever saw a Chinaman tear money up, and chuck it around. Here you, Ching, you're making a mess all over the place. Hoh Yuan'll give you fits when he gets back for dirtying up the palace! Where'd you get them?"

"See claptain hide 'em, plenty much care, in clabin," explained Ching Lang, in infinite disgust.

"Well, you're stung, and the joke's on you!" roared Kallinger, with another burst of guffaws.

A slow smile crept over Seaton's face —but it was not a smile that lent a pleasant expression to his countenance.

The little dissertation did not seem to have deflected Knapp from the subject under discussion.

"To blazes with the Chink and his 'queer'! he growled. "There's just one thing for us to do, and that's to hike out of here at once. If you can't see it my way, I'll go down to the ship, and put it up to Burke and the other four."

"That'll be Vernier, an' the new lot we shipped," interpolated McCrie excitedly. "They'll all be in the lay, an' their nationality's no' *French!*"

Seaton nodded grimly.

"But I tell you a day can't make any difference," snapped Kallinger; "and in that time we'll have Hoh Yuan's store aboard—the pickings of a year of his work. You've seen it. You know it's worth something fabulous—more than the last lot we ran for him. After the risk we've taken and what's been done, you're not going to be chicken-livered enough to go and leave it, are you?"

"I've told you once"—Knapp's voice was like a snarling cur's—"that my neck's worth more to me than pelf. I'll get out while I can, and when the others know about the girl and who she is, they'll say the same. I'm going down to the lagoon to put them wise, and I'm going now!"

"See here, Knapp"—Kallinger had dropped to a wheedling tone—"can't you be reasonable? We'll get out tomorrow, or the next day at the latest. There's no use stirring up a rumpus with Burke or the rest. I wish Hoh Yuan had kept his mouth shut to us about the girl before he went off. Can't you see we'll be rich? Rich, I tell you, man — richer than mandarins, once we've cleared this haul. Just stand pat with me on this, you won't regret it. Anyway, Burke would only laugh at you."

"Would he! What's your objection to my going down to tell him, then?" sneered Knapp.

Kallinger's voice dropped still lower, and for the next few minutes the listeners could catch only a scattered word of the conversation here and there. Then suddenly Kallinger burst out into a string of oaths.

"Aw, shut up!" was Knapp's snarling retort. "You can talk till you're sick, I'm going."

"Get out, then!" bawled Kallinger, evidently in a furious passion. "I'll show you who's master here!"

Knapp laughed jeeringly in reply, and a moment later came out of the hut. As he started off, two other forms, those of Kallinger and Ching Lang, appeared in the doorway, watching him. Knapp headed diagonally across toward the clearing. He had gone some five paces when suddenly Kallinger's arm went up, there was a flash, a puff of smoke, and then the sharp report of a revolver. Knapp staggered, spun half around, recovered himself, and, with a cry, turned and began to run for the shelter of the woods—straight toward the spot where Seaton and McCrie were hidden.

Again Kallinger fired—this time twice in rapid succession. Knapp flung up his hands, stumbled forward another pace or two, and then pitched headforemost between the trees, almost into Seaton's arms.

Kallinger's mocking voice reached them in brutal, cold-blooded derision. "It'll take you some time to reach the lagoon, I'm thinking!" he cried, and disappeared again inside the hut.

For an instant Seaton, stupefied with horror, stood seemingly paralyzed, then he reached forward suddenly and caught the wounded man by the shoul-

ders, dragged him farther into the foliage, and turned him quickly upon his back.

"Lift up his head, McCrie, quick! We'll do what we can, though I'm afraid he's beyond help." Seaton was tearing open Knapp's clothes as he spoke. Devil, as he now knew the man to be, and joint murderer of his own crew, the fellow was at least a human being.

The eyelids quivered—opened. Into the vacant stare came recognition. With a desperate effort, he made a motion with his hands as if to ward off a new terror that the sight of the faces looking into his seemed to bring him; and then, as though pleading that no further punishment should be his, he moaned:

"I'm—in! All—*in!*

McCrie wiped the fleck of foam from the purple lips. The eyes closed again, and they thought that the man had gone.

"The girl, man! Miss Wilton! Tell us where she is. For God's sake, Knapp, make what reparation you can!" Seaton's words were coming in sharp, fierce sentences, as though by the sheer force of his own will he would reach the other's consciousness.

Again the eyes opened, and Knapp's lips moved. Seaton bent over to catch the words:

"Back—of—in—there—where I was. Look out—Ching and—Kall——"

The eyes glazed, there was a spasmodic movement of the limbs, and Knapp had passed across the Great Border.

McCrie lowered the dead man's head, and wiped his own forehead with the back of his hand.

"'Twould be awful to die with a conscience like yon," he muttered, with a shudder. "Awful! Though I'd no' say but the Lord'll give him credit for the last. I'd no' judge him, ye understand."

The sound of Kallinger's pistol shots had evidently disturbed the few inhabitants who were left in the village. Women were now moving excitedly about the clearing.

"We must get away from here," said Seaton sharply. "Kallinger or Ching Lang may come out, or some of those women prowl onto us. Miss Wilton's in there in the big hut where Kallinger is. Thank God we've found that out! Powell and his men are surely up to where we left Fuller by now, and must be waiting for us. We'll circle around to them, and bring them up here before the Malays can get back—we ought to have an hour's leeway yet. I think that's our surest and safest plan, if you've nothing better to offer, McCrie."

"I have not," said McCrie; "we'll just——"

He stopped suddenly, and both men, alert, stood as silent as the body that lay between them. From across the clearing rose piercing, savage yells from many throats in unison, a scattered shot or two, and then the rattling crash of a volley.

"Too late!" gasped Seaton. "It's too late. The Malays, coming back, have run foul of Powell somehow, for he would never have started the fight with Miss Wilton to think of until he'd heard from us, unless he'd been forced into it. I don't see how it happened—they couldn't have been to the lagoon and back again by this time."

From where they stood, they could just see the path across the compound. The crash of another volley followed the first, and now dark forms appeared racing madly down the incline.

"Quick!" cried Seaton. "Here they come! Powell's chasing them in. We've got to get to Miss Wilton first, or her life won't be worth a chance in a million. Make a dash for the hut, and trust to getting Kallinger by surprise, or——"

The words were lost. With his revolver in his hand, Seaton was already running straight forward at full speed, McCrie close at his heels. It was not more than ten yards, and he covered it in record time. Halfway there, he saw Kallinger and the Chinaman come again to the entrance, but so engrossed were they with the racing mob, now well into the clearing, that they did not notice him until he was almost upon them.

He saw Kallinger's arm straighten out, heard his curse, then the roar of the sea was in his ears, and the powder flash scorched his face as something

seared hot along the side of his head, tearing his cap away. He fired from his hip, still running. Kallinger slid wriggling to the ground across the threshold. Ching Lang's white blouse was vanishing in the interior.

He leaped over Kallinger's body, and rushed inside. The Chinaman had snatched up a kris, and now, halfway across the room, was making for an inner apartment—but it was McCrie who fired, and Ching Lang sprawled forward on the floor.

"Miss Wilton! Betty!" Seaton shouted. "Are you there? It's I, Ja——"

Then he choked, stumbled, a mist swam before his eyes, but he staggered gamely on, the blood trickling in a stream from his side where the treacherous Chinaman, as he had passed, had risen suddenly to his knees and lunged viciously with the kris.

It was Ching Lang's last act—the little engineer took care of that.

"Betty! Betty! Are you here?" gasped Seaton again.

"Help! Oh, quick!"

The cry seemed to revive Seaton's fast-ebbing strength. He plunged desperately forward through what appeared to be a little hallway, and reeled out into a room beyond. A struggling group of native women were at the farther end. They fled shrieking at his approach. A girl rose to her feet from the floor, where she had evidently been thrown in the struggle, and came forward a step—then drew back in alarm.

"Oh! Oh! Who are you? What is it? What do you want?"

With powder-blackened face, reeling like a drunken man, his white canvas trousers and shirt wet with blood, Seaton was no pleasant sight.

"Don't be frightened, lady," called out McCrie reassuringly. "Your father with the marines'll not be long gettin' here."

"I'm Seaton—Jack Seaton—uster play with—Jack and Jill——" Seaton was laughing crazily, his head was swimming like a top, McCrie, the girl, the queer, fantastic Oriental furnishings of the room ran chaotically together—and then darkness.

The last drops of the engineer's jealously guarded brandy were burning his throat. McCrie was holding the flask to his lips. Deft fingers were knotting a bandage at his side. Memory, the realization of where he was came sweeping over him like a flash.

"Barricades, McCrie! Barri——"

"Aye, 'tis done—the best we could. There'll be two entrances, the one we came in by, an' the one by which yon female creatures went out."

"Prop me up by the passage, and give me my revolver," ordered Seaton. "You take the other door. Betty, get over in the corner out of gun fire."

"Jack, Jack, you mustn't!" And then: "Oh, Jack, I didn't know you!"

"Small wonder," he said grimly. "I fancy I'm rather a sight. Well, McCrie!"

"Man, ye're no' fit," snapped the engineer. "I'm thinkin' I'll manage with a little——"

"Do as you're bid!" cried Seaton angrily. "Or shall I crawl? Hurry! Can't you hear them? They're outside now!"

Unwillingly McCrie, with Betty's help, carried Seaton across the room, and placed him behind a couple of upturned cushioned divans that they had thrown hastily before the opening. Shouts reached them from outside, then the trampling of feet in the room beyond.

"They've found Kallinger and Ching Lang," muttered Seaton. "Get to the other door, McCrie, quick! They're running around the hut. Don't bother about me, I'm all right."

The next instant he had fired twice.

"Betty," he called hurriedly, "get over in the corner, as I told you. You can't help me here."

"Give me your box of cartridges," she pleaded. "Don't you remember you taught me to load when you were at the acad—oh, I didn't mean that!"

She had checked herself suddenly, and her face flushed, evidently misconstruing his action as he turned his head quickly from her to glance over at McCrie, whose pistols were cracking like a string of firecrackers.

"Give me the cartridges." The girl's

tones were steady, full. "Jack, I never believed *that.*"

"Little Betty!" he said softly.

The dizzy, swimming giddiness was overcoming him again. Some horrible, grotesque apparition was crawling through the window. He fired unsteadily. The hut seemed all surrounded with rushing demons, howling, yelling, shrieking. With all his strength he strove to fight against the numbed feeling that was paralyzing his brain.

"Jack, quick! In front of you!"

The girl's warning was just in time. Forms were creeping down the little passage, almost upon him. The barrels of both his revolvers blazed fire obediently, but something was wrong with them—the trigger pull was desperately hard. Above the tumult came a cheer, long sustained, and then another. As it rose and fell, now high, now low, his tottering senses associated it with the flapping of a tablecloth as one shakes it overside of ship to free it from the crumbs. Queer fantasy! But he understood.

"'Twon't last long," he murmured. "Not long—knows his business, Powell—keeping 'em on the run—no chance for 'em to fight—good old Powell—it's all right, Betty—little Betty——"

CHAPTER XI.

Came periods of torturing agony, sounds as of the booming of great thunderclaps, and then long, dreamy repose in which he floated in mid-air while fairy hands, cool, soothing, ministered to him. Voices, in soft tones, spoke out of the nothingness that surrounded him.

One voice he came to know and distinguish from the rest, tender and sweet, like the limpid music of a running brook. Sometimes it would seem to whisper almost in his very ear, and he would reach out after it, to hold and give it form, only to have it escape like the bubble at the moment of its greatest beauty when, sparkling with iridescent, rippling hues, it bursts and vanishes into thin air. Nothing was concrete—all was a land of unreality—intangible.

And then, one morning, he struggled back to consciousness. It stole upon him gradually. First the sensation of utter weakness, complete helplessness, bewildered wonderings of what had happened. Then his eyes opened and rested on a little, red-haired, undersized man hunched up in a chair before him, upon whose wizened face was an expresssion almost saintlike in its patience, as he pulled at a short, black, though quite empty, cutty that he held between his lips.

"Why don't you light it?" demanded Seaton suddenly, after a long, puzzling attempt to solve the problem for himself.

The little Scotchman jumped as though he had been stung.

"Man, but ye startled me!" he cried, and with a movement meant to be surreptitious swept the pipe into his pocket.

"Why don't you smoke?" insisted Seaton, as though the question were the most important one in the whole wide world.

"Man"—McCrie's voice was a whisper—"man, I'd no' dare. She's a tyrant—worse than the doctor."

This was quite beyond Seaton's comprehension.

"Talk sense, McCrie," he said querulously; and then, suddenly: "There's no time to waste! What are you sitting there for? We've got to hold them off till Powell comes. D'ye hear, man——" He was struggling up.

McCrie, with a chuckle, pushed him gently back.

"It's the hut ye mean. D'ye not know ye've been sick—very sick—for the matter of two weeks?"

"Two weeks!" repeated Seaton weakly. "Two weeks! Where am I now?"

"Surabaya. Aboard the senator's yacht, *Troubador*. Man, ye'll note the luxurious surroundin's." McCrie waved his hand comprehensively about the exquisitely appointed cabin.

Seaton closed his eyes, and lay still for a while to digest this information.

"Tell me what's happened," he demanded, at last.

"I was no' to talk," demurred the en-

gineer. "I'd no' like to anger the lass; there'll be trouble if I do."

"There'll be more trouble if you don't! I'll break your head, McCrie!"

"Tut, tut, man!" grinned McCrie, glancing cautiously over his shoulder to assure himself that the cabin door was closed. "I'm minded 'twill do ye no harm, though I'm disobeyin' orders."

"Go on, go on," urged Seaton impatiently. "Begin where I went under at the hut. I remember that."

"Aye," said McCrie, puckering his face reminiscently. "When ye keeled over for the second time, the first I knew of it was a cry from the lass, but I could do nothing. My hands were full, ye see. The next I knew she had your place—man, the sight thrilled me, she's a rare plucked one—I'd no' ask for a better in a fight."

McCrie paused, evidently to review the scene for his own satisfaction, and unconsciously his hand slipped into his pocket for the stubby, black pipe.

"Betty held the passage?" queried Seaton, his face flushing.

"Aye; she did!" replied McCrie proudly. "She did that—an' *well!* 'Twas a good fight, but 'twas no' for long, for soon Powell with his men were there, an' the lass' father. 'Twas a reunion 'twould have done your heart good to see, the joy of it, though she cried a bit over one Captain Seaton, thinkin' he was dead, or near by to it."

"McCrie," said Seaton sternly, "you are telling tales."

"Let be, man," returned the engineer imperturbably. "I can't go on with your constant interruptions. They were a demoralized set, the Malays an' Chinks, an' we hadn't much trouble gettin' back to the beach, savin' the trouble with yourself. We were minded more than once to drop ye by the way."

McCrie refrained from stating that for four weary, heartbreaking hours he had shared the burden of carrying his commander, and would let none take his place.

"Well, we reached the beach, an' there was a bit scrimmage with the gentlemen from the lagoon village, who'd got wind of what had happened above. 'Twas in no particular to be called a fight; 'twas no' worth the name, ye understand. The *Ajax* standin' in dropped a shell or two over our heads, an' we stepped into the boats for all the world like a church picnic, 'twas that peaceful——"

"Wait!" interrupted Seaton. "How did Powell come to get started on that fight that afternoon?"

"I'm thinkin' 'twas Providence, the way it turned out. Ye'll recall the Malays that passed us with the loads when we were hid in the bushes? Well, they did but go halfway to the lagoon. Double shifts, ye see; others of the same ilk carryin' the rest of the way, an' the first lot returnin' to duplicate the proceedin'. They an' Powell reached the same spot at the same time. I'm thinkin' there may have been a bit talkin' an' the lads no' overcautious, but it's certain anyway they were discovered. After that there was no choice for Powell—he's a fine lad—but to follow it up an' drive 'em along with no opportunity for argument, bein' mindful that we an' the lass was somewhere ahead of him. Where was I? Oh, aye, we'd boarded the *Ajax*. Oh, but, man, after that ye missed it. I'm fair sorrowful for ye. 'Twas a fight, aye, man, 'twas a fight!"

McCrie paused, wet his lips, and looked commiseratingly at Seaton.

"You bloodthirsty ruffian! Go on, McCrie, tell it."

"I could no' do it justice in any particular," sighed the engineer. "That night we stood off an' on outside the channel for fear they'd make out with the *Traymore,* though we'd naught to fear of that, if we'd only known it"—McCrie chuckled—"they couldn't move her, havin' no man of machinery aboard—a point which I'll ask ye to note is a calamity at all times. She's away now with Fuller an' the *Ajax* for Singapore, an' little the worse for wear. Knapp, ye mind, was the engineer, but bein' dead—ye understand! Well, in the mornin' we warped in by the channel. Oh, man, I can no' describe it, but my hearin's defective yet from the screech of the shells. Then we landed in force—in force, ye'll mind—a hundred of us,

an' for two days we scoured the island from end to end. 'Twas like the desolations of Jerusalem when we had done with it."

"Like the what?"

"I'm sore minded ye no read the Scriptures, Captain Seaton"—this with reproachful dignity—"but let me. I'll no' argue it. Burke we got—he's an old skipper, but deprived of his certificate long since by some board who knew their business—an' the other four we got, as well. They'll be snug in irons, with Powell to see they get their deserts. An' what was left of the native devils sent Hoh Yuan's head aboard as a peace offerin'. Burke confessed for the sake of court clemency, which I'm thinkin' 'll no' help him much. They were in cahoots with a Chinese firm in Singapore, an', of course, with Hoh Yuan for the distribution of the latter's pelf.

"Powell said he'd long suspected something of the likes, an' that Hoh Yuan was the prince of the cutthroats in these waters, though they'd no' been able to locate his nest before. Their business with the *Traymore* ye already know—Kallinger statin' she was a stray cat, an' only the gettin' of her bein' needful to own her with no questions to be asked by anybody. There's no' much else to tell. The—hist, man!" A light step sounded outside. "If ye love me, keep your eyes shut, an' likewise your mouth," pleaded the little Scotchman breathlessly.

The door opened very cautiously—and so did Seaton's eyes. He couldn't have kept them shut for all the engineers in Christendom. McCrie was sitting hunched up in his chair again, the same saintlike expression of resigned patience pictured on his face. In the doorway stood a slender form in cool, fresh, fragrant white—like a radiant vision she seemed to Seaton as he watched her through half-closed lids—the red of health in her cheeks, the sheen of gold in the brown of her hair, the sparkle of the great, deep eyes.

She tiptoed softly into the room. "I thought I heard voices, Mr. McCrie," she said, in a low tone.

"Sh!" whispered McCrie, placing a warning finger to his lips.

And then Seaton laughed.

With a gasp, the Scotchman lurched suddenly forward in his chair, his face turned a dull brick-red as the flush mingled with the tan, and then, with a look of mortal reproach at his betrayer, he fled incontinently from the cabin.

"Betty!"

She came forward slowly, and the look of severity she tried to assume was not severe at all, only a demure, little frown and a bewitching contraction of the arched eyebrows.

"You are not to talk," she said, shaking her finger at him. "I ought to have known better than to have trusted Mr. McCrie. But, oh, Jack! I'm glad you're better."

"Are you?"

It was a senseless, crazy, asinine thing to say, and he could have choked himself for the sheer idiocy of it. It wasn't what he wanted to say—far from it.

"Why, Jack! Of course, I am." The eyes, a little wider open, looked at him with a hint of surprise in their depths.

"McCrie says I've been out of my head for two weeks," he said nervously.

She nodded. "Between your wound and the exposure that night in your wet clothes, fever set in. We were afraid that—that you wouldn't get well."

"And you nursed me?" He was doing better now, much surer of himself—that horrible, tongue-tied feeling had left him.

But his opportunity had gone.

"You're not to talk." She evaded the question utterly.

"But——"

"Not a single word, sir!"—this very authoritatively—"or I shall have to go. Doctor Wilson would be terribly angry."

"Then I just want to say——"

She turned toward the door to put her threat into execution.

"——that I won't say a word," he ended.

The days went by, long, glorious days, full of sunshine, full, too, of Betty's

presence; days cooled with the gentle breezes coming in from the sea, that sent the ripples dancing and sparkling over the harbor where the yacht still lingered. Each day Seaton had found his strength coming back to him, until now he could almost walk alone from his cabin to the deck chair under the after awning.

Here, one afternoon when Betty had gone ashore, he sat alone. The book on his knee remained unopened. His elbows were on the arms of his chair, his chin cupped in his hands.

All too short those days, more like hours they seemed, he thought as he sat there. And now they were almost at an end. The next day they were going on to Singapore; then he must pick up the broken end of things, and knot them together again.

His brows drew close in troubled perplexity. It was a different problem this—like beginning all over again—there were new factors now—and he could not see the way. Somehow, the old life with its tang of danger and its reckless freedom had lost its appeal, and not alone because now the motive that had led him into it was gone, there seemed other things in life more worth while, better worth the doing.

His eyes traveled to the empty chair beside his where Betty had been accustomed to sit and read and talk to him through his convalescence. Yes, he knew it well enough, the change had come through her. His eyes shifted straight ahead of him again, and he smiled whimsically at his presumption.

What a bore and an untold nuisance he must have been, waited on, his wants and needs anticipated even, his feeble protests laughingly cut off before they were half uttered! He remembered it all, and he would always remember it. The days had gone, but their memory would be his whatever——

"Everybody deserted you, Jack, my boy? Lonely?"

Seaton started. It was Senator Wilton. "No, sir; thanks. I was just thinking that it was about time I got over expecting to be spoiled. I'm pretty fit again now, you know, sir."

Senator Wilton laughed, and dropped into the other chair. "We're going on to Singapore in the morning, Jack, I suppose you know."

"Yes, sir; Betty said so last night."

"After that, Jack, we're going to do Japan, and then back to Frisco. I want you to come home with us."

Home! Seaton's face lighted up, then clouded.

"I'd like to, sir; but I can't. It's awfully good of you. I'll have to stay in Singapore and look after the *Traymore;* she's the sum total of my worldly wealth, sir, you know."

"I wanted to speak about business," smiled the senator. "How about the navy?"

"No," said Seaton quickly. "No; it's too late for that now."

"It might be managed," remarked the senator. "There are ways."

"No, sir," repeated Seaton, shaking his head. "Really, I wouldn't think of that now."

"Well, I hardly thought you would, and, to tell the truth, I'm rather glad you feel that way about it, though I must admit my reason for feeling so is a selfish one. I own a few boats myself; in fact, no small part of my money is invested in that way. To get to the point, I've been wanting somebody like Captain Jack Seaton, for instance, to look after them for me."

"I! Look after the White Crescent Line!" Seaton gasped. "You're joking, sir!"

"They're freighters, of course, and not beauties; but they're good dividend earners," went on the senator. "You would have nothing to do with the commercial part. I want a practical man at the practical end of the business. I would buy in the *Traymore,* and add her to the fleet, paying you in shares of the company to sort of make you feel at home. Now——"

"But I——"

"You mustn't interrupt," laughed the senator. "It is really all arranged, cut and dried. I took the liberty of speaking to Mr. McCrie, and we'll leave the *Traymore* to the care of Fuller and

himself. Now, I'm not going to be pestered with either questions, protestations, or thanks; and, besides, I've some letters to write, so I'm going to leave you. There's McCrie coming for company."

And with a hearty slap on the shoulder, Senator Wilton rose from his chair, laughingly put his hands to his ears, and tramped off down the deck.

Seaton stared after him until he was out of sight, and then looked up to meet McCrie's eyes.

"Well, man, what's troublin' ye?" inquired the little Scotchman.

"McCrie," said Seaton slowly, "you know of the proposition Senator Wilton has made me?"

"Aye; I know," replied McCrie, wagging his head. "Well?"

"Well, I don't know what to do, that's all. I don't know whether to accept it or not."

Halfway out from the shore, coming toward them, was the yacht's launch. Both men watched the boat in silence for a moment. A trim, little figure in the stern stood up, and waved a white parasol.

McCrie's face puckered into a grin. "I'd no' venture an opinion as to the course ye'll pursue, Captain Seaton," he chuckled, watching Seaton's handkerchief flutter an answer to the signal; "but I've suspicions—very strong *suspicions.*"

MR. BARKER AND THE PIE

MR. BARKER, principal of a boys' boarding school in a Chicago suburb, had as his pet theory the association of ideas. He was always impressing on his pupils the value of getting their minds into such trim that one idea would suggest another to them. One day when he was on a train, a man approached him, and said:

"I'm glad to see you, Mr. Barker. I know you don't remember me, but I do remember you. I do, because your name always reminds me of a dog. It's the association of ideas, you see."

This appealed to Barker as a great tip for his pupils.

"Now, boys," he said to one of his classes the next day, "you know I have always talked to you about the value of the association of ideas. I have tried to teach you that one thought should always remind you of another. I am going to give you a test. Why do I remind you of a dog?"

The class was silent for a long time, but finally a little fellow held up his hand, and piped out, in a childish treble:

"Please, sir, I know; but I'm afraid you'll whip me."

Barker had whipped him the day before.

"Don't be afraid. Speak right out," said the teacher kindly.

"It's because you always take the biggest slice of pie at dinner," was the conclusive answer.

THE SLOWEST TRAIN IN THE WORLD

HE looked like a banker, but he acted like a madman. His train was late, and he tramped up and down the platform as if he wanted to walk, rather than ride, to his destination.

"This train is so late," he yelled, "that if you flung it off the top of the Washington Monument, it would hit the ground behind time!"

NOT AMONG THE PROHIBITIONISTS

Christian Heurich, the millionaire brewer of the District of Columbia, has, on the upper left-hand corner of each of his checks, this inscription:

A check on Prohibition.

The first part of this story was published in the April Month-end Popular. The two issues containing the early chapters can be procured from any news dealer.

The Making of a Jockey

By H. W. Richards

Author of "The Coup That Failed" Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Lud Loden, becoming an orphan and homeless at a very early age, supports himself by doing odd jobs around the local livery stable. He shows a wonderful fondness for horses, and finally persuades Frank Warren, manager for a famous "stable" to put him to work. Under Warren's care and excellent advice he learns the rudiments of riding and managing race horses. He finally leaves Warren and strikes out for himself. Going to Norwood Park track he succeeds in "working out" a thoroughbred of whom everyone is afraid. It is a spectacular performance, and at its conclusion Jim Porch, one of the best horsemen at the track, makes Lud his stableboy. Bimbo, the thoroughbred, is owned by Smooth Ben, "the toughest proposition on the toughest track in America." "Make Bimbo a stake horse and I'll pay you five hundred dollars," is Ben's offer to Lud. Lud takes Bimbo in hand and begins to put him into form. While he is doing this, Miller, Porch's jockey, takes the boy to a race and gives him valuable pointers. Lud rides a race and shows that he can handle a thoroughbred like a veteran. Bimbo, Smooth Ben's hope for the Club Handicap, is at last given a fast tryout, and Lud shows that he has developed him into a great race horse.

VI.

IF Smooth Ben had carefully made his plans and felt confident of their success, Lud Loden had studied just as long and patiently how he could profit by winning with Bimbo the Club Handicap.

In his past life Lud had had to take care of himself, and for this reason was blessed with self-confidence. He knew Bimbo was fit for the race and could not only go the distance, but beat Leaflet any one of the ten furlongs. Bimbo would be the rank outsider, and would be held at fifty to one. There would be at least forty books in the ring, and each would take ten dollars at the odds. He wanted to bet half that sum, one hundred and fifty dollars straight and to protect this bet fifty dollars for show.

Lud had no conscientious scruples against betting. The boy who had been a crap shooter for revenue only was not likely to have any great moral principles. He would need assistance in carrying out his plans. What Lud Loden needed he always acquired.

Long before daylight, on the day before the Club Handicap was to be run, he quietly dressed himself and went to Bill Masten's stable. There was none to hear his proposition. Mr. Masten took the money and became Lud Loden's betting commissioner, a position which he was qualified to fill.

After the boy had gone, Mr. Masten made a few figures with the office pen on a sheet of official paper. The stub of his check book showed Mr. Masten had drawn out of the bank one hundred and fifty dollars on the day he accepted Lud Loden's offer.

The day of the race came. Trainers looked out at the morning sky, and all declared the weather would be ideal for racing. The track was certain to be fast, and every one of the nine probable starters accepted the issue. Outside the entry only two were thought to have a chance, Mayfield and Dubuc.

To the inquiry of Justice himself, Jimmy Porch frankly said the horse which beat Mayfield would win.

"You ought to know as well as I which horse it will be, Justice," blandly added Porch, and Mr. Justice smiled condescendingly.

Dubuc had been prepared in Kentucky, and his owner thought he had a

good chance. At any rate, he had shipped him to Norwood to win if he could. Few of the others were confident, but were willing to take a chance, for good racing luck was a great factor in a contest of the kind.

Smooth Ben was more than ordinarily truthful. His colt was acting well. Every one who saw his workout on Wednesday—a mile and an eighth in one-fifty-eight—said he had improved. Still, it was his first start this season, and there was no telling what he would do. Bimbo had only cost three hundred dollars, and if he won the Club, it would pay him fifteen to one. He would not send a dollar into the ring, nor would he go himself. This settled the odds on Bimbo; he would be fifty to one. All of this information was given to the betting ring by Mr. Justice's agent.

Was it strange Frenchy had declared Norwood to be the cheapest crap game on the planet?

Fully fifteen thousand people saw the Club Handicap run. For days the race had been the talk of the town. Shop windows had a display of Club ties, gloves, and handkerchiefs; while others had whips, saddles, bridles, and racing colors. For weeks many had saved in order to go to the track and put down a bet "just for excitement."

Not one in ten could tell which his choice was when it came on the track, and fewer still the winner, until the number went up. Yet these human moths rushed at the candle—the betting ring—and fought and struggled to hand their money to the bookmakers.

Once in the drift of the throng, it was useless to try to get out; the only way to do was to follow the crowd current until the end of the ring was reached. Courtesy was never shown, though good nature was the rule.

At the second betting the struggle was at its height.

When Bill Masten went into the ring he wore a neat derby hat, a high white collar, and a firm, expansive shirt front, fresh from the laundry; a natty tie, and well-pressed clothes. When he came out, some fifteen minutes later, the hat was crushed, the collar wilted, the shirt front crushed and limp, the cravat untied, and the buttons of his vest gone.

When he met his assistant betting commissioner—foreman of the livery stable—the latter, with mussed hair and ruffled clothing, was sweating and panting. Neither saw anything ridiculous in the disordered garments.

"The money is on," grimly said Bill. "If we cash our tickets, there'll be no mob to fight."

The foreman glanced at the battered hat, and struggled to rebutton his collar.

"It is as bad as going through a thrashing machine," was all he said.

Lud Loden had spent the greater share of the morning in Bimbo's stall. Though the colt knew he was to race, he showed no nervousness. As for the boy, he had no doubt of the result. At length the warming-up gallops were over, the boys lifted into the saddles, and the parade made.

Justice's horses led, then came those certain to be unplaced, and lastly Dubuc, Mayfield, and Bimbo.

Prudence caused Justice to have these positions awarded. If Bimbo was a vicious brute, he wanted him placed where, if he injured any, it would be the dangerous opponents, and not any of his candidates. What jarred on Justice's nerves was the applause given by the grand stand to Dubuc, Mayfield, and Bimbo. He turned to his agent.

"It's that blame' Bimbo," growled the latter, "and it's all Brett's doing. He wrote up Bimbo as the dark horse in the race, and says if he should run kind and true there'll be a new track record. I never see so many two-dollar bets go on a long shot in my life."

"Has he got a chance?"

"I can't tell. This is his first this season. I don't know anything about him. One thing I do know. That boy Lud can handle him. He is the best-behaved horse of the bunch. Bimbo is no man-eater."

Smooth Ben took his place in the infield close to the eighth pole. He could see the start, and knew that the race—if he won—would be over at the end of

nine furlongs—for it was there that Leaflet must be beaten. His riding orders were very brief:

"Get away well. If Leaflet goes out in front, let her lead to the mile, and then go to the front in the last quarter at once, and stay there."

This was Lud's plan, for he argued that Leaflet and Bishop would be the pacemakers.

Ben was very nervous, though everybody thought him cool and collected. If he won, it meant fifty thousand dollars, sixty thousand dollars—maybe seventy-five thousand dollars. And he would know the result in fifteen, ten—perhaps five minutes.

Masten and his man were near the timer's stand.

"Hang the race!" groaned Bill. "All I want to see is the end. They win at the wire."

Porch, Frenchy, and Brett were near the center of the track, balanced on a hurdle. Here they could see the start fairly well and have a fine view of the finish.

"I expect to whipsaw this race," remarked Porch. "I put one thousand dollars on my horse for place at five to two; then I bet fifty dollars on Bimbo straight."

"I've bet fifty dollars on Bimbo," said Frenchy.

"Just what I bet on him," confessed Brett.

Porch turned in surprise. "Thought you never bet. What's the matter? Something wrong, I know."

"I resigned by request to-day," grimly said Brett. "Justice and Scripture demanded my dismissal. I am not sorry, for the *Star*, of Willville, wanted me and offered ten dollars more a week. Funny. Mr. Laurence wanted me because of my honesty—Justice wants a man who will support his methods. The *Paragraph* will pay me two hundred and fifty dollars for breaking the contract. If Bimbo wins, I will not go out of town broke. But they're at the post. Let's watch them."

Lined up back of the starter were the usual crowd of trainers and horse boys. Porch could see the horses quite well at times, but Brett with his glass could tell each by the rider's cap.

Had the starter been given a free hand, he would have sent the field off on even terms without delay, but he knew that the Justice horses must get off in front, and Leaflet, if possible, beat the flag.

Twice it looked like a start, but the flag did not fall.

Porch swore roundly, for delay would hurt Mayfield's chances because of his heavy impost.

At length Dubuc swung across the track in front of the starter and then turned into place.

After a short delay the line again moved, and this time the flag cut the air. Leaflet and Bishop had a good lead, but Philbin was not so quick as Dubuc or Mayfield.

"Bimbo is left," groaned Frenchy, for the black colt was two lengths back of the moving field. Then the exercise boy shouted: "No, he ain't. Lud got a flying start. He can eat 'em up when he gets ready. But the game was to leave him."

Hardly had the field lined up when Miller spoke to Lud.

"He wants to leave us—you and me and Warfield. Look out. Leaflet and Bishop will get off in front."

Lud nodded. The boy sat still, but his eyes were on the flag. In the shifting about, Miller, who knew Warfield well, saw that he feared Bimbo, and at once surmised he had been told the colt was vicious.

"Don't fear him, Warry!" he warned. "Watch the starter. He wants to leave us."

The negro showed his teeth. He knew Miller would not lie.

"Looks like a steal," was Warfield's answer.

An assistant starter tried to grab Dubuc's bridle, but Warfield swung his mount right in front of the starter.

"Make him keep his hands off," he yelled. "You may leave me at the post as you are trying to do, but you can't hold my horse."

The starter's face reddened, and, clutching his flag stick, was ready to

assault the negro with it for a weapon —when he heard a voice at his elbow:

"Go slow, Peter; go slow. That's my horse. Better remember that."

Warfield moved back into place, and the field was in motion. Leaflet and Bishop were out in front. The positions were satisfactory to the starter, and he dropped his flag.

The race was on.

When Lud saw Warfield move Dubuc into place, he pinched Bimbo, and the colt began to walk briskly up to the leaders, though he was a good six lengths back.

The boy knew the flag would not fall were he, Miller, or Warfield in front. His hope was to be in motion when the signal came, and if Bimbo were in his stride three or four lengths in the rear, it would not hurt his chances.

He saw the starter's hand tighten on the staff, and knew the flag was about to fall. Then he bent his head and pinched his mount.

The next thing the boy knew, Bimbo was extending his stride, that Miller and Warfield were already in motion; and, as he looked down the track, he saw Leaflet and Bishop flying in front.

Lud was not confused or alarmed. He knew that while Leaflet and her companion had gained a good lead, the effort to acquire it would tell heavily in the last quarter.

Making no attempt to hurry his mount, the boy allowed him to settle into his long, sweeping stride before permitting him to rush after the leaders.

In marked contrast were the efforts of Martin on Philbin. The latter had a good position when the flag dropped, but was not in his stride. Without waiting, Martin hustled him into motion, and made an attempt to outfoot Dubuc and Mayfield, both of whom were quick breakers.

Philbin raced up to the latter, and Miller put up so hard an argument that Martin was forced to call for his mount's best efforts. The whip fell, and Philbin was in the lead, leading by a short length.

Out in front, Leaflet and Bishop had a lead of a good six lengths, then Philbin by a scant length, with Dubuc and Mayfield side by side, and Bimbo a length back.

Smooth Ben was between the judge's stand and the eighth pole. He had seen the gift to Leaflet and Bishop, and as the two went by he knew they could never hold that pace for a mile, much less a mile and a quarter.

With alarm, he saw the rush of Philbin. Where was the great speed of Bimbo?

Then Philbin, Dubuc, and Mayfield whizzed by, and Ben saw the leader was doing his best. He looked for Bimbo.

The black colt was now sweeping along, the great stride even as clockwork.

Now the head of the boy sank lower, and, as he went by, Ben saw there was determination and confidence on the childish face. Bimbo was gaining and just beginning to race.

Why had he doubted him or the boy? Again he felt dazed and dizzy. He would *win*.

Down the track they flew, and his eyes followed his horse with honest pride. For a moment greed was forgotten, and he thought only of the noble effort of his horse.

He started in alarm. The appearance of Leaflet and Bishop had provoked feeble cheers, now there was a roar of voices, all shouting for Bimbo. Those voices were fresh, clear, and strong, not the hoarse yells from whisky-burnt throats, nor the hysterical shrieks of nameless women.

Ben was wise in some things. He knew it was the small bettor who shouted loudest. Had the colt's great beauty or the long odds caused the enthusiasm? He looked at the first turn. Bimbo was leading Philbin; the latter was sprawling, floundering, beaten. And hardly a quarter of a mile had been run!

Out in the field, Jim Porch quickly snapped his watch when the timer's flag went down. He watched Leaflet and Bishop jump off in the lead, and one would have thought he had no horse in the race.

As the two passed the eighth pole, he glanced at his watch.

"They can't last," he said. "That first eighth was in twelve and one-half, and they are going faster now. Miller and the nigger are showing sense. They know something about pace. Oh! Just see Philbin come!"

Brett was staring through his glasses. Frenchy was waiting. He saw Bimbo strike his stride; a few seconds would tell what he could do.

"They made the first quarter in twenty-four and one-half," announced Porch. "That's too fast. There goes Bimbo. The boy timed his rush well."

"Any one would say from the confident look on his face he has the race won," said Brett.

"Philbin is out of it," gleefully shouted Frenchy. "He's sprawling now. Not too fast, Lud; not too fast. Long ways from the wire."

Still leading by six lengths, Leaflet and Bishop turned into the back stretch.

"Forty-eight and three-quarters," Porch informed his companions. "That's too fast. Bishop will quit at the three-quarters, and her end will be at the mile, say a mile and a sixteenth; that's her route, anyway. Bimbo is cutting down her lead, and my horse is gaining on her."

"But not on Bimbo," said Brett.

"He's the horse I have to beat, and I'm afraid Mayfield can't do it. There they are at the three-quarters, one fourteen and one-half."

"And Bishop is beaten," shouted Frenchy.

They saw Bishop wobble and then fall back, for Bimbo was not two lengths behind. Leaflet rushed from her stable mate, who bore out. In an instant Lud had darted in, and was leading the beaten Bishop. Then Leaflet toiled on until the last turn.

"She'll bear out there, she always does," shouted Frenchy. "Bimbo has the race. There! What did I say? She is shortening her stride now."

"She swung very wide," commented Porch. "Sure sign she is done. Good mile, though; one-forty-one flat."

The two were well in the stretch. Brett now spoke:

"It's Bimbo."

"Mayfield made the mile in forty-two," mused Porch. "Miller said the horse that beat him would have to go the route better'n two-eight. And he *will*. Leaflet is quitting fast, and Mayfield will get the place—but, Lord! how that Dubuc hangs on."

Smooth Ben watched the race up the back stretch, confident that Bimbo would win. He saw his colt close the gap slowly. But this gave him no alarm. In all his workouts and in his trials, Bimbo had shown his greatest speed in the last quarter.

"They can't stop him in the stretch," he thought.

And then Ben was dazed. As in a dream, he saw Bimbo, without an effort, rush into the lead, sweep by him a good two lengths in front of Mayfield and Dubuc—and he knew he had gone under the wire an easy winner.

He heard the shouts in the grand stand, and now they sounded far away and melodious. Then he wondered if the penniless and starving had been the one to profit by his colt's victory.

A dandelion, one of the first of the season, lifted its yellow face from the grass, and he stopped to pick it.

Suddenly came the thought he was now rich! Rich? Why, it would take six figures to write his fortune. He turned to walk to the judges' stand, to be there when his colt returned.

How his head reeled, his feet dragged! How hard it was to breathe! Ben was suffering the most dreadful of all nervous strains known to followers of the race track—the terrible aftermath of winning a big race and making a big killing.

Lud Loden knew when he saw Martin rush Philbin to the front that whatever chance the horse had of winning was gone. The pace was too fast to last. When he felt that Bimbo was in his stride, he waited for Philbin to show signs of distress.

The shouts from the grand stand were all for Bimbo; that he knew.

As they reached the first turn, the

boy saw that Philbin was sprawling, and knew he could make little or no battle when Bimbo made his rush.

Lud had no desire to lock Bimbo with Philbin for a long and nerve-racking struggle—that would be asking too much of his mount, for no three-year-old can safely measure stride with an aged horse for any great distance.

When Philbin was tired and wavering, he sent Bimbo by him like a flash, and took up the trail of the leaders.

Around the first turn he made no great effort, and in the long back stretch patiently began the task of closing the gap, waiting for Bishop to tire.

He watched the track rise and fall, pulsing beneath Bimbo's feet, and the grass of the infield move by like a mammoth green rug.

Then he again eyed the leaders. He was quite close to them now, barely two lengths back, and they were close to the three-quarters pole. Wren on Leaflet heard him nearing them, and urged his mount on; then Bishop tired, fell back, and bore out.

Hugging the rail, the boy sent Bimbo on with a rush, and Bishop was no longer a factor.

Leaflet was leading by a scant length. Lud had no intention of urging Bimbo around the turn, but was content to hold his own.

Wren knew that Leaflet was a quick responder, and planned to gain a commanding lead before turning into the straight run of the last quarter.

He went to the whip, and did gain a couple of lengths, but the effort told, for when Leaflet reached the turn she swung out wide, so wide that Lud shot Bimbo close to the rail, and when the two entered the straight last quarter Leaflet was but a half length in the lead.

Wren saw his fate. Viciously he swung his whip. For a few seconds Leaflet made a game last attempt, and then fell back, beaten so tired she could not make an effort to battle for the place with Dubuc and Mayfield.

For the first time Lud Loden gave Bimbo his head. He knew that the track was running beneath them a stream of golden, quivering sand, and they were breasting its current; that, though the day was calm and still, the air was striking his face and roaring in his ears.

Then came the roar from the grand stand; at first a wild, unmeaning hum, then clear, distinct, understandable words, shouts for him to come on and win.

The wire was the object on which his eyes were fixed. How long they were in reaching it! Had Bill Masten bet his money? If he had he was now rich.

Bimbo knew the end was coming. Not for an instant did his long stride falter, that stride which was eating up distance and carrying both on to the goal. The race had not been bruising to him. He had overcome Philbin when the latter was powerless to struggle; disposed of Bishop, too weak to make even an effort; and, when he had headed Leaflet, she had little speed left with which to make an argument.

Now he was in the lead with much strength in reserve. No whip had stung him with brutal force, no spur knifed his side. With nostrils all wide, with outstretched head, he came on—running on his courage—making his own pace. Then——

Bimbo had won the Club Handicap.

The great struggle was for place. Miller was famous for his strong finishes, indeed; Warfield had a great reputation. Mayfield with his great impost fought gamely to the end. Miller knew the horse always had something in reserve when the final call came. Mayfield had—just enough to win place by a head.

Out in the field old Jimmy Porch was looking steadily at his watch long after Brett had put his glasses in their case. The turf writer turned to the old man.

"They smashed the track record for the distance. It is two seven and one-quarter now," said the latter. "That hoss of mine done all we asked him, and more; took up his weight and beat his trial. They said two eight would win it. Well, he was there in two seven and one-half. That's good enough."

Lud was given the ride in the floral horseshoe. Yet he did not like it. *Bimbo* had won the race—not *he*. The great effort of the horse was forgotten.

Next day the papers would tell about Lud Loden's skill. All they knew was what they saw, for the story of the transforming of Bimbo was not known.

Though very conceited, Lud was just. He knew Miller had ridden the great race. The handicapper had loaded Mayfield with lead, knowing the horse was no weight carrier; the long delay at the post was the starter's work to ruin his chances, and yet Mayfield had run far better than his trial. He might have handled Bimbo with great judgment, but Lud Loden was firm in the belief that Miller had made the master ride.

Lud was glad to get away from the crowd. He was tired, and for the first time in his life knew what it was to be nervous.

At last he went to Bimbo's stall. The colt showed no great fatigue—no more than he did after his trial with Mayfield.

Smooth Ben was in a chair in front of the stable.

"Come here, Lud," he said, and his smooth voice was weak and quavering. "You did all you said you could. They say I am a rascal, and I guess they're right. But I'll do more than I said I would. You get one thousand dollars."

That night in his hotel Ben read telegrams from his agents, and knew he had won over eighty thousand dollars. Success affects men strangely. Ben would have lost gamely. When he knew the amount of his winnings, he cried like a child.

VII.

A cold, drizzling rain made the early morning of the day after the winning of the Club Handicap intensely disagreeable. It had begun before midnight—at first a gentle dripping of the clouds—scarcely more than a mist—increasing until it became a steady downpour of big drops, falling spitefully, though there was little wind, making the narrow street, none too inviting in the sunlight, dismal and forbidding.

The narrow sidewalks were splashed and slippery, the stone pavement had many pools of stagnant water, while the gutters were now sluggish, foul streams.

At long distances apart, the street lamps feebly fought the darkness, the weak flame making a bright circle which turned into gloom before another could take up the losing battle.

It was the darkest hour of day—the hour which precedes dawn. No policeman paced the beat—for that matter seldom did in the best of weather—and the street cars ran with uncertainty.

Only one human being was visible; a little figure, that of a boy wearing rubber cap, overcoat, and boots, walking noiselessly and rapidly along—a shining, glinting black form when seen in rain-proof armor in the glare of the street lamp, becoming an uncertain, flitting shadow, vanishing in the gloom only to reappear, fade, and become lost to sight again.

In his little office, Bill Masten sat waiting the coming of Lud Loden. He was thankful for the rain; it had given him something to think about, something to do, something to take his thoughts from the big sum in his keeping.

Masten in his lifetime had bet very often on horses, and, as a rule, carried no great care with his wagers. For the first time he was unnerved.

At the track he had been so excited he could not now remember how he had collected the money or how he had so carefully put it away in his many pockets.

He knew he and the foreman had walked home together, speaking in hushed tones, fearful they were being followed—an absurd fear, for he had never known of a man being robbed of his winnings.

His share had been given to his wife, and no sooner had he entered the office than he had locked Lud's money in the safe, certain no peeping Tom was watching him and sure none but himself knew it was there.

He had found the early night nerve-racking; every sound startled him. The rain caused a great demand for carriages, and he was very busy.

At three o'clock it became quiet, and he was alone. He took down his pistol, and put it in his pocket. The distributor of morning papers left a bundle for the near-by news stand, and Masten was thankful his only words were deprecating comments upon the weather.

The street was deserted. Masten's keen eyes followed the lamps one after another without seeing a person.

Returning to the office, he took the Sunday *Paragraph* to read Brett's account of the race, for, being a good horseman, he wanted the description written by a competent man.

In the telegraph news his eye caught something about Smooth Ben's big winning.

The first dispatches were from Willville, and stated that the foreign book at Monroe Park had paid out over thirty thousand dollars to the backers of Bimbo.

Another dispatch declared that at Lawndale the foreign book of Justice and Scripture had been hit hard. The manager would not tell how large his loss had been, but it is well known that little or no money had been bet on the Justice entry. The Turf Exchange, the big pool room of Justice and Scripture, according to a Beartown dispatch, had lost heavily, for the entry had run for the book. New York pool rooms admitted they had paid out over one hundred and fifty thousand dollars on Bimbo.

Another paper, the sporting editor of which used much slang to conceal his little knowledge, had a headline:

SMOOTH BEN'S HOG KILLING.

As Mr. Masten read these accounts of the big winnings made in various cities, he looked grave and worried.

Again he turned to Brett's report. The turf writer seldom wrote "chalk dust" or about the "rag and slate"—in other words, left betting as much as possible out of his reports, treating the evil as an incident of the sport and not a prominent feature. There were a few lines to the effect that it was estimated that fully forty thousand dollars had been taken from the betting ring by the friends of Bimbo, though there had been no plunge, the play coming from small bettors who played long shots.

The writer of slang, however, claimed that the money had been won by sharp practice, and Smooth Ben had been guilty of unprofessional conduct. An investigation was needed. Then came the charge that Lud Loden had been guilty of rough riding, having interfered with both Philbin and Leaflet, and declared that the boy should be disciplined, if not ruled off.

Masten knew the charges had been inspired by Justice.

He started nervously, for some one was entering the barn. Stepping quickly to the office door, he saw a rubber-clad form rushing in from the street, tearing off its cap and shaking the rain from its coat.

Masten looked out. The rain was falling in sheets, and at once he closed the door—something unusual. Then the two went into the little office.

"Just in time," laughed Lud. "I saw that cloud chasing me, and I legged it. What ails you? You looked scared—as white as a ghost. There's nothing to be afraid of—it's only a rainstorm."

"Sit down, Lud," said Masten weakly. "I ain't scared as I know of, but I'm nervous—just nervous. The worst of it all is I can't help it."

"You bet the money?"

"Every dollar. Ten—twenty at a crack, and fifty with the big store. Lud, you're eight thousand dollars to the good; more than that, for I bet twenty dollars straight for you."

"Keep that for your trouble."

"My trouble! That's good. Why, I took down eight thousand dollars for myself. The old woman has that for safe-keeping. Why, Parmer won three thousand dollars. We win an even twenty thousand dollars. That ring was hit for forty thousand dollars straight enough. The chances are Smooth Ben is one hundred thousand

dollars to the good. It was a sure-enough hog killing."

"Ben never bet a cent at the track."

"I know, I know. He hit the pool rooms. Justice must have paid out sixty thousand dollars on the race. His foreign book and pool rooms were pounded until they bled. But, Lud, I'm afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"Of that man Justice, Lud. You don't understand. Ben can take care of himself. But Justice may go for you. That's the worst of it."

"Me! What can he do to me? I rode an honest, fair race."

"I know. But just read this"—and Masten pointed to the paragraph which stated that Lud Loden had been guilty of rough riding and should be disciplined.

The boy laughed after reading it, and told Masten there was no chance of sustaining the charge.

"Why, I beat Philbin before the first turn," he said, "and Leaflet quit in the stretch. Every one in the grand stand could see there was no interference."

Masten shook his head.

"You don't know the gang, Lud," he said. "Justice will lay for you and order his judges to rule you off. It won't make no difference whether you're guilty or not guilty, you'll get it in the neck. There your troubles will begin. You can't go to any other track and ride until you get reinstated. The chances are that if they let you get back, they'll make you do dirty work to pay for it."

Lud dropped his head. He knew what Masten said was true, for Frenchy had told him something similar weeks ago—just after he had ridden Hardy in his race against Bishop.

Masten asked: "Any one know you know me?"

Lud shook his head.

"Any one know you come here? Did you tell any one I was to bet your money for you?"

"Of course not. It wouldn't do. I'd be knocked down and robbed of it in no time if any one knew I had nine thousand dollars. I thought all about that." Then he added: "Nobody knows I am here. Miller went home last night to spend Sunday. He won't be back until to-morrow. You see, I am safe."

"Parmer knows nothing about this, anyway," mused Masten. "And he promised not to say a word about my big winning. I don't think they'll find it out, and if they do, I can tell them I followed Brett's tips. He wrote that if Bimbo would run up to his form a year ago he would be dangerous; in fact, would have a great chance.

"Lud, it was a godsend when you came here that morning. That eight thousand dollars I win to-day buys me a home—a house that's worth fifteen thousand dollars if it is worth a cent. I had it all arranged to pay three thousand dollars down—I've got that money—and the bank was to loan me five thousand dollars on a mortgage. At the last moment the bank refused, I don't know why, so I took a chance to-day. Now I can pay the eight thousand dollars in cash and ask no odds of no one. Then I'll have enough to fix up the place and buy for two thousand dollars rare old mahogany furniture that is a bargain at twice that.

"I guess that's the reason I am so broke up like. I often wonder, if the real truth was told, whether there haven't been as many men made comfortable by their winnings as have been ruined by the gambling habit.

"Well, about you. Talk the matter over with Jimmy Porch. The old man has as many friends as any one racing to-day. He can tell you what is best to do, provided Justice makes trouble. And he will. All I hope is that he makes his play at once. The sooner the better for you. But don't tie up with Ben—that won't do. Don't let 'em know you have a dollar. Mind what I say; if Justice gets after you, you have got to go. If you go to Willville, see me before you go; but if you stay here, at Norwood Park I mean, don't come to see me for some time. If Justice knew you were here to see me, he'd raise Cain with you."

Masten went to the safe, and took out

the money. His hands shook as he slowly counted it and handed the bills to the boy. The latter unbuttoned his shirt, and drew a leather bag from his bosom. In this he put the bills. "My bank and my chest protector," he grinned, and rebuttoned the garment. Then he put on his cap and was ready to go.

"How about Ben?" asked Masten.

"He told me he would pay me one thousand dollars for my work and the ride. To tell the truth, my work was dirt cheap. Any good jockey can now ride Bimbo. His mouth is healed, and he is a good-natured horse."

"Just the same, don't tie up with him. All rascals are at times generous. Ben can't be honest any length of time—it isn't in him. Well, you'd better go. Here, take these papers. If you are caught, you will know what to say."

The heavy downpour was over, and the rain was again a constant drizzle. Again that little form flitted into the glare of the light to vanish and reappear again.

It was not five o'clock when Lud Loden went into the side gate of Norwood Park, and he was certain he had not been seen by a soul since leaving Masten's barn.

He reached the stable, and knew he had not been missed. Hanging up his hat and coat, he decided not to go to sleep again, but sat on the side of his bed, wondering if it was not a dream.

He was worth over nine thousand dollars, and a month ago he had been glad to work for ten dollars a month—his wages at Elkhart Farm! Could he keep it up, or would he again know what poverty was? Would Justice drive him away? He must wait and see. Lud knew he could not fight the track owner. To him the newspaper was the power which ruled the world.

When he learned that Brett had been forced to leave the *Paragraph* because the track owners did not like his reports, Lud Loden wisely concluded that Justice and Scripture must be men of great influence. And so they were. It was they who named the mayor, a majority of the aldermen, and in many things controlled the legislature. In those days the race track was a great political power. One State was controlled by the "sporting" element which became so obnoxious and lawless that racing was stopped entirely.

Let none think an effort has been made to put around the head of Lud Loden the allegorical gold ring or to place him on a pedestal for hero worship. Nothing of the kind has been contemplated.

That he was a bright boy possessing great talent—yea, a positive genius—for riding and caring for horses, his dearest foe would cheerfully admit; but his ideas of honesty and business morality were decidedly vague.

With him, to win was the first and last object in life; and, according to his theory, that man was wise and great who, though he succeeded by foul means, was shrewd enough not only to escape detection, but to avoid suspicion. He had no conscientious scruples, and it took him years to learn that to be a *great* jockey meant an *honest* jockey.

For a long time his theory of success and advancement was to "get in right with the right people." Is it the theory of the horse boy only?

Porch was stirring. Lud at once joined him, and together the two made the rounds of the stable, and then the boy went to see Bimbo, finding him no worse for his great race the day before. It was Sunday and raining and little to do. He read the accounts of the race, and was surprised to find Brett was the only one to give him credit for skill and judgment.

For a long time he sat waiting to hear something about what Justice was going to do. But the expected did not happen. At last he went to see Frenchy, but the latter did not mention Justice's name.

It was nearly eleven o'clock when he went again to see Bimbo. Smooth Ben was there, haggard and pale, but not talkative. Lud did not know the man was suffering from the nervous strain he had endured. Once he thought Ben looked at him pityingly. Then a voice said:

"You Smooth Ben? If you be, Mr. Justice wants to see you up at the office. He said he wants you and old man Porch to come down as soon as God'll let you."

Lud saw a young man, short and stout, with a very flushed face and watery black eyes, very flashily dressed, and very important.

"What does he want?" Ben asked in his soft, purring voice, though Lud saw that his lips were pinched and his face drawn.

"He'll let you know. Better get a move on ye."

Lud knew the storm had broken. Still, he had hopes, for the man had said nothing about him. That Ben was not subdued was evident.

"You had better go up and tell Mr. Porch what Mr. Justice wants, and if he decides to go I may go along with him," said Ben softly. "I am sure that will be the better way."

"Where's his stable?"

"I am going up there now. If you feel disposed, you may walk along with me."

"You tell him what I said. I don't feel like walking around in the mud."

"You are paid for it."

The young man turned angrily toward Ben and asked: "What d'you mean by that?"

"Just what I say. I believe you are Mr. Justice's servant, and if servants don't do as they are ordered they lose their jobs. If I were you, I would speak very respectfully to Mr. Porch and not call him 'old man.' He might not like it, and you might feel very sorry you provoked him."

Lud Loden was already on his way to the stable.

Jimmy Porch had carefully read every word contained in the morning papers about the Club Handicap, and felt certain Justice would show his teeth. Lud had told him of the summons, and the old man grinned as he carefully raised himself from a chair.

As the lackey from Justice looked at the huge bulk of the Missourian, he remembered the warning of Smooth Ben. The message was given in a halting voice. Porch told him to go back and tell Justice he would be there directly. Then the man hesitated.

"He said bring along the boy what rode Bimbo," he said sheepishly.

Lud thought of what Masten had said. Would they drive him away from Norwood? He had begun to hope he would escape, but now he knew there was no chance. In a way he enjoyed it all. He would be there, an interested observer of all that would be said and done. After all, he was of greater importance than he had first thought.

Back of the long table in the center of the room Justice and Scripture sat waiting, Justice red, blustering, and anxious to voice his wrath; Scripture cold, unemotional. At a desk in a corner was another man, the manager and secretary of the firm. He acted as if he were busy writing.

No sooner had the three entered the room than Justice screamed:

"Fine work you do! You win the Club Handicap, don't let me run one, two, six, and I start three horses! Then you burn up my books and butcher my pool rooms! What do you say to that? What you say?"

Up to this time Smooth Ben had been the most subservient man at the track. He was now defiant. While walking to the office the thought came to him, why should he, now that he was worth over one hundred thousand dollars, fear Justice and Scripture? He had done nothing that any horse owner should feel ashamed of. It was time to assert his manhood. He had been too easily ruled in the past.

"Say?" he repeated. "Say nothing. I win fairly and honestly. What have you got on me, anyhow?"

"You'll find out," roared Justice. "On this track no gent starts a horse that is *meant* unless he tells me."

"You know I said I would win if I could, didn't I?" asked Ben.

"You said it was his first start, and you didn't know whether he was any good."

"Well, I do now. So do you, for that matter. You knew your three were good, didn't you?"

Justice was very red. The cold eyes of his partner showed no emotion.

"It was a job," yelled Justice. "You bought that colt to come here and rob me. We lose over seventy-five thousand dollars. It is a steal, I say, a *steal.*"

Smooth Ben grinned. "Who is to blame? If you'd won, I'd 'a' lost. Do you think I would have squealed?"

"You said you wouldn't bet."

"I said I would not send a dollar into the ring or go there myself, and I didn't."

"Who was it that bet on Bimbo, then? We lose over forty thousand dollars—my books in the ring. Who bet that money?"

Ben shook his head. "That is for you to find out. I never heard a word about that until this morning. I do know that every one was calling Bimbo when they came down the stretch for the first time. I thought they were the pikers. The only way I can account for it is they liked his looks; he is a handsome colt."

Justice was beaten. He believed Ben told the truth. His men had told him it was the two-dollar and five-dollar bets that swamped them.

"But the pool rooms! You played the Turf Exchange and my foreign book at Lawndale. How about that?"

"Suppose I did. What are your pool rooms for if not to take the money offered them? They could have refused my bets. Lawndale took one hundred dollars straight and twenty dollars show at fifty. I took down something over five thousand. Why, I win twice that amount at Monroe Park, and they laugh at it. I am told your books were instructed to take all the money and let the entry run for the book."

"You should have told me. The odds were fifty to one. I should have had a chance."

"You did. You started three horses."

"But the other money," began Justice.

"I tell you I can't understand it," angrily said Ben. "Why, in New York they pounded Bimbo from thirty to four. I don't know how it happened."

Justice was puzzled. All reports from the pool rooms were to the effect that after the first big bet the money came in small amounts. He turned to Porch.

"What you say?" he began, but he stopped in fear. James Porch was a man to be feared, a man of great strength, and when aroused was the terror of the track. Then it was well known he had the reputation of being "the only honest man racing at Norwood." The old man came quite close to the table.

"No bluffing with me, you four-flushing cur! It won't go. I told you the horse that won must beat me." The old man's voice was trembling in his earnestness, and he came closer to the table. "I bet a thousand on my horse for place, and I win. If I'd lost, do you think I'd come here and cry like a baby? You loaded my horse with weight until you thought I didn't have a chance, had a thimblerigged race, and then got beaten. Your starter tried to leave me and Warfield and Bimbo. And you don't run one, two, six."

The old man's voice was broken now, a sure sign he was dangerous.

"Learn this, you dog! When Jim Porch starts a horse, he starts to win if he can. He backs his own horses. I did bet fifty dollars on Bimbo straight. May have made a mistake in the bill. Mistakes must go on the race track. You know that. But I race to win, I bet to win. God hates a kicker, a crybaby, and a coward. Don't try to bluff me. I'll call it every time, and it won't be Jim Porch that gets hurt.

"There's one thing you might as well get into your head for good," and the big hand was close to Justice's face. "Don't you ever go to telling me I ain't honest. Just do it once, and I'll break every bone in your body. If you don't want me to race here, say so. But don't you dare say I'm crooked. There isn't a track owner or a horseman or a jockey but what will say you lie."

Justice was crouching and shaking. He had heard of Porch's bad temper, but had no idea the old man would

defy him. For the first time Scripture spoke:

"No reflections of any kind on Mr. Porch, Justice. If you quarrel with him this firm is dissolved."

Scoundrel though he was, the predominating good quality in Jim Scripture's make-up was his respect for an honest man—a man honest from principle, not ignorance.

"Mr. Porch acted fair," said Justice hastily. "But Smooth Ben must go."

"What did I do?" boldly asked Ben.

"I can't say. You may be all right, but I suspicion you played a game on me, all right. Then that boy, Lud Loden. You say he came out of the bushes, and he rode the race like a finished horseman. Fine thing you two do! You cost me sixty thousand dollars if you cost me a cent."

"Suppose I had lost," said Ben quietly. "What could I have done?"

"That don't go with me. I look out for myself. You'd better take your horses and go. You know what that means."

"I don't care to stay," said Ben. "Remember one thing: You've no kick coming. I did just what I said I'd do. I don't know why they played Bimbo in the ring."

"It was Brett," said the secretary. "I told Mr. Justice so on the day of the race."

"And I taught him something," shouted Justice. "He had to get out. I run this town. No man can buck me and stay here."

Porch turned to go. "I ain't trying to kick up a row," he said sullenly, "but Brett was the best man who reported races at your track. It'll kill racing in the end—such dirty work as you do."

"What do I care?" retorted Justice. "I'll hang on to my money. I won't starve."

Lud had an idea he had come out of the quarrel with flying colors. None suspected he was the cause of the really big play in the Norwood ring.

After dinner Porch took him to the little room in the stable where all the important talks took place.

"Lud, this is bad business," he said. "I can't protect you. Justice intends to lie in wait for you. They'll manage to get something against you, and those judges will rule you off. Then they'll fight your reinstatement. Besides, the starter can put you on the ground any time. I know Justice would go for me if he dared. But you must leave this track at once."

"Where can I go?"

"I shan't stay here much longer," confessed Porch. "I am going to Willville just as soon as I run off my stake entries. You can go up there and ride a month or so until I come along. Tom Brookins will take care of you. You'll not find it easy work there. Monroe Park has the best light-weight boys going. But it won't do to take another mount on this track. You have money?"

"Ben owes me one thousand dollars."

"As much as that? Then he did treat you white, after all. Strange! Every rascal has a good streak. Yet I wouldn't tie up with him, though I trust him quicker than Justice. What a fool the dog is! He has an idea he knows a lot about horses, and he don't know a thing. Do you know Philbin ought to have won the Club—at any rate, should have been second? If they'd trained him right and rode him right, you would have had a hard time to win, though Bimbo is a great colt. You needn't tell any one, but I'm going to buy Philbin. Me and Miller can take him and win at Willville.

"Now, you get away as soon as you can and keep away from the grand stand and the betting ring. Look here, son. I know who caused that plunge on Bimbo. They have not found out, and yet they may. Mark what I say. You and me will see the day when Norwood Park is closed. That Justice gang will kill the game."

Smooth Ben did not tarry; as soon as possible he shipped his string East. He tried to get Lud to go, but the boy declined, and very sensibly said that he was not good enough to ride against the Eastern jockeys—though if the truth must be told his deprecation of his own

ability was at variance with his belief, for Lud had a fixed opinion—which no amount of evidence to the contrary would change—that he could outride any man on earth.

Ben, however, kept his word, and handed the boy two five-hundred-dollar bills.

"I'm not generous," he said, "only decent. You made a stake colt out of Bimbo. I'll say this much. You done all you said you would, and more."

Lud's eyes sparkled.

"Bimbo's all right now," he declared. "His mouth is healed, though it is best to keep the rubber bit working. One thing: Get the best man you can to ride him—a man with fine hands. Be sure and tell him all about the sore mouth. Bimbo is a sweet-tempered horse now; nothing ugly about him."

Lud had no more mounts at Norwood. As he did not go into the grand stand, the paddock, or the betting ring, few knew he was at the track, for since Brett's departure none of the racing reporters came to see the workouts in the morning or visited the stables.

With Frenchy for a companion, he watched the races from the infield, and learned much about the mistakes of jockeys.

He made one of his early morning calls on Masten. The liveryman had bought his new home, and wished Lud could go and see it. The man believed it was his duty to look after the boy, and said he would run up to Willville.

"I know a big banker there," he said, "a man who owned trotters, and I worked for Frank Kadren when he trained for him. I'll hunt you up, and we'll go and see him. You mustn't carry that money around with you. Put it away, and don't touch it. Have something to fall back on when the rainy days come."

Frenchy went with Lud to the station. As he shook the boy's hand and wished him good-by, he said huskily:

"It's too bad, Lud, too bad. What I told you the first day I saw you is true—Norwood is the cheapest crap game on the planet."

Curled up in his cushioned chair, Lud argued that it was his ability which had caused the ill will of Justice. Now he was convinced he was an important factor in the racing world. He would succeed in Willville just as he had at Norwood. Great as had been his self-confidence, it was greater now, when he thought how he had come to Norwood unknown, friendless, and penniless, and was leaving with nearly eleven thousand dollars in cash.

At the thought of the money, the little brown hand touched the shirt front, and the proud heartbeats made the chest protector tremble.

The stops were becoming less frequent, and the train was whirling into the night. Lud Loden, the jockey, was fast asleep.

This is neither the time nor place to waken him.

THE END

Don't fail to read the opening chapters of Francis Whitlock's new serial of the Lost Legion; in the first June POPULAR, out two weeks hence, May 10th.

HIS FAVORITE AUTHOR

EUGENE NEWMAN, the writer, was in the National Press Club one day when a friend of his twitted him about having memorized all the novels written by Sir Walter Scott.

"I am not an intemperate reader of Scott," explained Newman explosively. "I've read 'Quentin Durward' forty times, 'Ivanhoe' a hundred times, and all the rest of Scott's novels at least twenty-five times; but I can't see why the thunder anybody should comment on it—and I won't stand it!"

Louis' Joy Ride

By Max Marcin

Author of "Spot Cash," "One Heiress Too Many," Etc.

A motor-car comedy, with Louis the unsophisticated in the limelight. The sad, sad story of a young and enthusiastic clothing salesman who tried to combine pleasure with business, with the usual result

"WOMENS," observed Joe Feldman, with an air of prophetic wisdom, "you should positively let 'em alone. A feller what spends all his time playin' auction pinochle is got it a chance to become a shark and win money from the fools what play with him. But womens!—what can they do for you except make trouble? So, believe me, when I seen you this mornin' ridin' around with them two womens in the oughtermobile, I couldn't help from thinkin' as how you was wastin' your time and the firm's good money on a lot of foolishness what there ain't no percentage in at all."

"But," protested Louis Asher, "the ladies were Mrs. Aaronson and her daughter Rosie. I took them out for purely business reasons."

"It wouldn't make no difference if the ladies was Mrs. Astorbilt and her daughter Becky," returned Joe. "Because you took Aaronson's wife and daughter out for a ride ain't going to get you his order. There's some salesmen, the minute they get on the road they take it for a picnic with girls and teeayters every night. Then there's others what know the location of every barroom and the first names of all the bartenders, but couldn't remember the name of a buyer to save their lives. And there's lots of them what never thinks of hustlin' for an order till all the expense money is lost at pinochle or poker. But you can take it from me, the fellers what do most of the business is the steady-going ones, with wives and families at home what have to be supported. Oncet in a while you find it somebody what is a gambler or a drinker or has womens on the brain and is a capable salesman besides. But he's an exception, and you shouldn't hold him up as a model."

The sage advice fell on unheeding ears. Louis tilted his chair to a more comfortable angle against the wall and gazed fixedly through the big plate-glass window of the hotel.

Salem's main street reflected the afternoon activity of most New England towns—an endless line of men and women parading up and down the thoroughfare. The spectacle held no interest for Louis. His mind was engrossed with a single image in white, dainty as a rose petal, with eyes of a soft, lambent brown, and tawny hair that clustered in light, fluffy ringlets about the temples. The vision wove a film before his entranced eyes, through which the procession of faces appeared as a blurred outline of moving forms.

The sense of unreality with which Louis' drowsy mind regarded the dim parade was succeeded by a sudden alertness as his eyes beheld the gracefully erect figure of a woman emerging from one of the stores across the way.

His languor fled before an onrush of energy that precipitated him out of his chair and caused him to head for the door.

Feldman's amazed eyes followed him in a hazardous journey, between passing trucks and clanging trolley cars, to the opposite sidewalk, where Louis'

speed diminished until his pace accommodated itself to the swinging gait of the woman.

As she fluttered from shop window to shop window, feasting her eyes on the show of feminine finery, he persisted in her wake, occasionally advancing a few paces ahead of her and bestowing on her a look of respectful admiration. She remained entirely indifferent to his attentions. Once, however, she directed at him a glance of furtive curiosity, which Louis promptly misinterpreted as a sign of awakening interest. But she met his enchanted gaze with a look of stern repulsion. Louis turned his abashed face in the opposite direction and headed for the hotel. In the lobby he found Feldman, engaged in conversation with Ed. Burke.

"Who was that woman that you run after like there was a fire somewhere?" asked Feldman.

"I don't know," replied Louis. "But I'd like to meet her."

Feldman regarded him with an expression of friendly solicitude. "Say, you'll get yourself arrested yet for flirtin' with people what you don't know."

"I wasn't trying to flirt," retorted Louis. "I was content merely to look at her. The first time I saw her was when I was entering Aaronson's store this morning, and I've been unable to get her out of my mind. She's a queen."

"These village queens are a pretty wise lot," remarked Burke. "You'd better let 'em alone if you don't want to get stung."

"I think the village girls make the New York women look like pale counterfeits," Louis returned.

"All womens is counterfeits," flashed Feldman. His face wore a far-away look, as if recalling a painful experience. "It don't make no difference whether they come from the country or the city, they're capable of making a monkey out of a man just the same."

Burke, big-featured, florid-faced, who looked as if he had dipped deep into the pleasures of life, passed a sly wink to Louis.

"Feldman talks as though he's had experience with women," he remarked.

"Betcherlife I have had it plenty of experience," returned Feldman. "And not so many years back but what I can remember 'em. And if Louis was wise he wouldn't take Mrs. Aaronson and her daughter Rosie for no more oughtermobile rides. Them womens is a couple of grafters just like Aaronson. And if they was to see you runnin' after another girl like you did this afternoon, they'd queer you with the father so sure as you're standin' there."

"They'll not regulate my conduct, even if I miss a sale," declared Louis. "If I want to meet the village girls I'll meet them. I like them a whole lot better than the New York women. They're more artless and they're not a crowd of schemers——"

A roar of mirth jarred Louis into silence.

"These New England village girls are a simple-minded lot—sure!" Burke mocked. "Louis, you went through college, but they didn't teach you anything about girls. You've got a lot to learn about them."

"Yes, they're so simple they can spot an easy mark a mile away," joined Feldman. "I betcher one of 'em has Louis spotted already."

Louis dismissed their derogatory comments as the sordid opinions of men whose lack of culture deprived them of the finer sensibilities; whose knowledge of human nature was limited to the narrow channel of commercialism in which their lives flowed. No wonder, therefore, that anything which savored of romance or idealism aroused only their derision!

He was glad that his first season on the road had not rendered him callous to the more refined attributes of the gentler sex; that his ideals had not perished in a remorseless wave of experience.

"I may be nourishing an illusion," he said, "but I hope to retain it as long as I live. I'm content to keep womanhood on a pedestal."

"So am I," answered Feldman. "And

I'm content to keep away from the pedestal."

Louis' attention was again distracted by a passing figure in white—the girl who had exerted such a powerful fascination over him. As she tripped past the window he almost acknowledged himself in love with her.

"She's beautiful to the eye and beautiful to the mind," he summed up her charms, metaphorically kicking himself for a cad in having profaned her superior loveliness by ogling her in the street. Amazement succeeded admiration, however, when he beheld Burke dart into the street and greet her as an old friend. The two shook hands cordially and proceeded down the thoroughfare.

Louis regarded the couple with a revulsion of feeling. "I don't see how she can know a fellow like Burke," he said petulantly.

"For an Irisher, Burke is a fine feller," returned Feldman. "A girl would be lucky to get him. He makes six or seven thousand a year sellin' cutlery, which ain't so bad these days."

"But he's so coarse," protested Louis. "He regards everything from such a materialistic viewpoint."

"That's a pretty shrewd feller," maintained Feldman. "If you could sell clothing like he can dispose of razors you'd soon be a partner in the firm."

Louis, recalling an engagement with Aaronson, left his companion and sauntered into the merchant's store. Near the little private office he was met by Rosie.

"I'm awfully glad to see you, Mr. Asher." She favored him with a smile of unreserved welcome. "I waited here because I hoped you would come." Louis discerned in her presence a valuable ally in winning the father's order and beamed his satisfaction. "Mother and I want you to remain in town to-morrow night and join us at the dance of the Moses Mandel Hebrew Charity Association."

"Why, I shall be delighted."

Rosie's smile expanded into an expression of keen delight. "There'll be mamma and me and my cousin, Esther Ginsberg, and her sister Sadie—that's four of us going together," she burst forth ecstatically. "With you it will make five." She opened her chatelaine bag and produced a small package of cardboards. "Five tickets at two dollars is ten dollars," she figured, passing him five of the printed cards.

He took them with the reluctant grace of one compelled to accept the sharp blade of a dagger. A wave of resentment surged up within him, but the danger of losing Aaronson's order checked the impulse to reject the tickets. With a forced smile he pressed a ten-dollar bill into her waiting palm and expressed his pleasure at the opportunity of escorting her to the dance.

Inwardly, however, he was comparing her with the young woman who had occupied his mind all day. Rosie suffered by comparison, physically and mentally. He resented her plump figure, as lacking in grace; the glow of health in her cheeks bespoke too much material well-being—he preferred the spiritual paleness of the other's face. Louis thought he also detected in Rosie's eyes a suggestion of cunning, as though they were always on the alert for the main chance. And the main chance, he knew, was marriage. So he determined not to say or do anything which might be construed as the beginning of a romantic attachment.

He entered Aaronson's office wearing his most businesslike air, and proceeded to expatiate on the advantages of Asher & Kominsky's new fall line of men's and boys' clothing.

"I want to get you to come right over to the hotel and look at the samples," he said. "I don't believe you'll find another line in the country like mine."

Aaronson remained entirely unimpressed.

"I'm selling a sixteen-dollar suit," Louis continued, "that ought to retail at not less than thirty-five dollars. The coat has an extra watch pocket in the outside breast pocket and an additional fountain-pen pocket in the inside breast pocket; there are perspiration shields at the armpits to protect the lining, and a match pocket on the inner left side

of the garment. The vest has an elastic band under the right side to fasten to the trousers button, thereby keeping the vest in shape; and there are side buckles to produce the smooth-fitting back. For a fob, there's a slit in the welt seams of the lower left pocket, or I can give you a special pen pocket over the upper left pocket."

Louis paused an instant for breath, noting with alarm Aaronson's indifferent attitude.

"Let me tell you about the trousers," he rattled on, in a final effort to arouse the merchant's interest. "They have a permanent crease which prevents bagging at the knees; tunnel belt slides hold them firm over the hips; there's an improved secret money pocket that the slickest thief couldn't find; and the side pockets are of a new design, cut to follow the shape of the hand, and with a blind catch stitch that keeps the contents from rolling out when in a reclining position. Yes, sir, our clothing is a huge step forward in the manufacture of men's garments," Louis concluded, mopping his brow.

Aaronson regarded the young salesman with an expression of easy tolerance. He waited until certain that Louis had exhausted himself, then reached for the box containing the best brand of cigars and offered one to his visitor.

"That's a fine line of talk you got," Aaronson said, affectionately stroking his coarse, dark-brown beard. "But talk don't go with me. I got to see the goods and learn the prices. But I'm too busy to go with you to the sample rooms to-day or to-morrow. Besides, I got it a suspicion my daughter asked you to go to the ball to-morrow night and you didn't refuse the invitation." He bent on the young man a look of close scrutiny, as if weighing him in the balance. "So you're Simon Asher's son Louis?" he asked.

Louis acknowledged he was.

"Your father is an old landsman from mine," Aaronson continued affably. "Yes, sir, we come over on the same steamer thirty-one years ago last April. And I understand it he's made quite a big fortune and that you is just out of college?"

"I graduated last year," Louis replied.

"Well, you still look it like a college boy," declared the merchant. "But since I seen you this morning when you was so kind as to take my wife and daughter out for a free ride, I formed it a liking for you. Besides being the son of an old landsman, you look like a gentlemans, which is something what I can't say for some of the other drummers who comes here. Most of them fellers I wouldn't let my daughter be seen in the street with, but with you I ain't got no objections she should be seen. A fine girl like Rosie, with a dowry like I'm goin' to give her, is got to be careful of the young men she goes with. And I can say for her, she always was strict in selectin' her company."

Louis' face beamed a silent acquiescence. "She's a charming girl," he agreed. In a bold effort to return to the object of his visit, he said: "Do you know that in materials I've found the smooth-finished effects in worsteds and cheviots most popular this season. And they're buying more grays, blues, and browns than ever!"

"My Rosie is the smartest business woman what I ever met," Aaronson returned. "She's even smarter than her mother. I never buy a bill without consultin' her first."

The remark had an immediate effect on Louis. Rosie's good will had a commercial value—it might be the deciding factor in disposing of a good bill to Aaronson. He determined to cultivate her friendship, but in a reserved way, so as to leave no false impression of his motive.

"I shall be glad to learn to know Rosie better," he said. "And I shall look forward to the ball."

As he left the store, Aaronson regarded his retreating form with appraising eyes.

"A salesman he ain't!" he exclaimed, turning toward his wife. "What he don't know about approachin' a customer would fill a big book. But between him and some of them yokels

around here, as a son-in-law I'd sooner have Louis. Maybe he and Rosie come to have a cordial feeling for each other yet; which ain't such a ridiculous idea, neither, for if he's anything like his father Simon, then the young man ain't takin' no girls out for free oughtermobile rides unless he's lookin' around for a good match. And he might do a whole lot worse than our Rosie!"

"I think you might encourage him by buying a good bill," sugested Mrs. Aaronson.

"Such a sucker I ain't," the husband retorted. "Without I got it a guarantee of his intentions, I ain't offerin' no encouragements in the way of orders at exorbitant prices. It's bad enough when I got to do it after the engagement is announced."

"But he may be timid?" ventured Mrs. Aaronson.

"A feller what walks into a store and finds the merchant out and promptly asks the daughter and her mother out for a oughtermobile ride ain't so timid that he needs to be led by a string. I only hope it that he ain't a trifler, for a good-looking boy like him could make our Rosie in love with him so she'd break her heart over him."

Rosie, approaching from the rear of the store, caused the parents to turn abruptly and busy themselves behind the counter.

"Father, did you give Mr. Asher an order?" she asked.

"Why are you so anxious about him?" demanded Aaronson, assuming an innocent air.

"I think he's very nice," she replied. "He's such a thorough gentleman! So unlike the other salesmen who come here!"

"Not yet I didn't give him no order," the father informed her. "But if his prices is right maybe I do business with him."

Rosie's future and his own effect on it did not agitate Louis' mind once he had left the store. Blissfully ignorant of the significance which the Aaronsons attached to the short automobile ride, he permitted his mind to hover about the attractive personality of the girl who had disappeared down the street with Burke.

By the time he reached the hotel he had quite forgotten Aaronson and the dowried Rosie.

"Did you sell Aaronson?" Louis came out of his absorption on hearing Burke's familiar voice.

"Not yet," he replied. "Who was the young woman you went off with?"

"You mean Miss Boswell? Oh, I've known her several years," the cutlery salesman replied.

"I should like to meet her," Louis said, an auroral blush mounting to his forehead.

"Sure!" responded Burke. "I'll take you around to her house after supper."

The rare privilege of making her acquaintance aroused in Louis a timidity entirely alien to his nature. Also, he became possessed of a clammy fear that she would seize the opportunity to humiliate him for his rudeness on the street.

His customary self-confidence had withered and drooped by the time he reached her house and accompanied Burke up the steps. A cold perspiration beaded on his brow when he was ushered into the parlor; only by superhuman effort did he restrain the inward urging to vanish through the door and dodge around the corner as the pattering of her footsteps sounded on the stairs.

"Miss Boswell, let me introduce my friend, Louis Asher. Louis is selling Yiddish hardware for his father's house, Asher and Kominsky," Burke introduced. "He was anxious to meet you, so I steered him around."

Louis stifled a groan. His first thought was to apologize for his friend's crude flippancy, but he dismissed it and stood in constrained silence, eying the girl. She still wore her gown of fluffy white; but in the light of the overhanging lamp her beauty, it seemed to him, shone with a softer radiance.

"Mr. Asher, aren't you the young man I saw in the street to-day?" she asked, extending a hand.

It seemed to him her voice, though

modulated to a low pitch, had an accusing ring.

"I must apologize for my conduct," he stammered. "It isn't a habit with me—ogling young women. But you were irresistible."

"You looked so funny!" She laughed at the recollection of it.

Louis shrank inwardly—it served him right, he felt. Moreover, he was ready to accept any reproof she might offer. But he resented the outburst of glee with which Burke greeted her remark.

"That's a good one on you, Louis!" the cutlery salesman exclaimed. "But I've got to go," he added, consulting his watch. "I've got another engagement."

"You always have so many engagements!" she replied.

Somewhat reluctantly she permitted Burke to go; then, turning to Louis, she invited him to a seat.

"Traveling men are such a fickle lot," she sighed. "I suppose you also have a girl in every town?"

"Some of them have—but not me!" he protested.

"Oh, dear, no!" she mocked. "You are different—as different as all the others say they are."

Her flippancy did not lower his high estimate of her. "When I first saw you, I hardly dared hope for such good luck as to make your acquaintance," he remarked.

"I suppose all you traveling men learn to talk that way!" She smiled wistfully at him.

A helpless expression crept into Louis' face. His gallantry was sincere—it was unfair to be placed in the general classification of smooth talkers. He was uncertain how to proceed.

"I hope to have an opportunity of proving my sincerity," he ventured.

"Are you fond of automobiling?" she changed the subject. "I just love it," she continued, in the same breath. "If I had any one to take me I'd go to the celebration at Breckenridge to-morrow."

"I should be delighted to take you," said Louis eagerly.

"I'll order a machine for ten o'clock to-morrow morning." She almost leaped for the telephone and called up a garage. "Tom," she shouted into the transmitter, "there's a traveling man that's invited me out to Breckenridge. Have the machine here on time." She hung up the receiver and turned to Louis. "They're very reasonable in their charges at that garage," she said.

Louis got back to the hotel an hour later, possessed of a feeling he could not diagnose. His analytic mind failed in the effort to determine whether he was an unmitigated fool or had fallen into undeserved luck. Nor had he come out of his uncertainty when he awoke the following morning; and at ten o'clock, when he presented himself at the house, he was in the same undetermined state.

The automobile, a big white car, was drawn up at the curb. It held two occupants. The chauffeur and the girl were in the front seat.

"I love to ride in front," Miss Boswell declared, with a pert toss of the head. "Get right in behind."

In the course of an hour Louis gathered that Breckenridge was three hours distant from Salem by automobile, and that the celebration was in commemoration of the town's fiftieth anniversary. The next two hours Louis spent in solitary enjoyment of the scenery, alternately cursing the chauffeur's monopoly of the girl and bemoaning the mounting cost of the ride. It was six o'clock when the auto got back to Salem. They had been gone eight hours.

"At seven dollars an hour," the chauffeur reckoned, "you owe me fifty-six dollars."

Louis, choking with rage, did not protest.

"I had a most enjoyable time," said the girl.

"So did the chauffeur," Louis muttered, under his breath. Aloud he said: "May I call again before I leave Salem?"

"Oh, do, and we'll take another spin in the auto," she cried over her shoulder, as she ascended the steps and entered the house. The chauffeur, after thrusting the amount of the ride in his pocket, followed her within.

Louis wanted to explode then and there; instead he merely coughed up some of the dust of the road and returned to the hotel on foot.

As he started for his room the clerk called him back and handed him a letter. It was from Rosie Aaronson.

Your conduct to-day prevents my going to the dance with you. Kindly save yourself the trouble of calling for us.

Louis read the note with unbelieving eyes. He was unable to recall having committed any act which could possibly justify this curt rejection. Not until he met Feldman was he enlightened on the subject.

"You got yourself in fine to-day with the Aaronsons!" Feldman burst forth. "They seen you out oughtermobiling with a woman. Such a fool as to do such a thing I didn't take you to be."

"What have they got to do with my taking a young lady out for a ride?" demanded Louis.

"They got enough to do with it to turn you down. You got it as much chance now of selling Aaronson a bill as I got to borrow a million dollars from John D. Rockefeller. I wouldn't care nothin' about it, only them robbers stuck me with five tickets to the ball and I got to take 'em there. So it just goes to show how your foolishness will hurt an innocent party."

Feldman walked away, an expression of mingled disgust and resentment on his face. Louis, determined not to be cheated out of his order, ate a hasty supper and donned his Tuxedo. At nine o'clock he strolled to the hall wherein the ball of the Moses Mandel Hebrew Charity Association had just commenced. He found the Aaronson family in one of the boxes overlooking the dance floor, and for a moment he stood expectantly in the narrow opening that led to the box. Louis remained entirely undismayed by their ignoring glances.

Tapping Aaronson on the shoulder, he asked the merchant to step into the aisle. Aaronson squeezed his way past his wife and daughter, meeting Louis' insistent stare with a look of firm determination.

"What's the meaning of this note?" Louis fired. "I suppose it was sent with your knowledge and consent?"

"Betcherlife I knowed about it and I consented to it," the merchant flared back. "And when I once make up my mind I never change it. I got no use for a feller what'll take one girl out ridin' one day and another girl the next. My daughter Rosie is very particular who she goes with, and I forbid her from even talkin' with you. If you got to spend money on oughtermobiles you should think of the customers what you do business with. And, furthermore, a feller what can go out oughtermobile ridin' all day has to put the expense on the goods what he sells. So I prefer it to keep the money in my own pockets and buy from salesmen with less expensive tastes."

"Oh, so that's it?" sneered Louis. "You resent my taking any one out for a ride except your family! Well, you can keep your order. I guess my firm can do without it. Besides, it isn't worth while to do business with a man that has your reputation as a close buyer."

He strode downstairs, conscious of having administered a stinging rebuke. On reflection, however, it occurred to him that the sting had come from the other side. His visit to Salem had cost him close to eighty dollars, and he was leaving the town without an order. But it was too late to retrieve his costly mistake, so he hung around the dance hall until he found opportunity of expressing his thoughts to Feldman.

"I agree with you, they're a couple of grafters up there in that box," he said.

"And you'll learn yet them girls from the New England towns is so smart they could take the shirt off your back," replied Feldman.

"Well, I've found one that's different," Louis maintained. "And to-morrow I'm going to take her out for another automobile ride. I don't care what I spend, but I'll make the eyes of the Aaronson family pop out of their heads."

On the following morning the idea had grown on Louis until he could bare-

ly sit through breakfast before carrying it into execution. He would pass and repass their store, flaunt his indifference in their faces. And the opportunity of riding alone with the artless Miss Boswell would more than recompense him for the financial outlay. He called the young woman on the telephone and invited her to ride. She accepted with alacrity.

"I'll have the machine here at ten o'clock," she said.

But Louis had planned otherwise. On this occasion, no monopolizing chauffeur should accompany him. Moreover, he would ride in the self-same automobile in which he had taken Mrs. Aaronson and Rosie out two days ago.

"Don't trouble to order a car," he said; "I have one engaged."

The note of disappointment in her voice as she promised to be ready at the appointed hour did not escape Louis. He wondered vaguely what had caused the sudden change in tone—did she have reasons for preferring the white car in which they had made the pilgrimage to Breckenridge? Probably it was just a woman's whim, he concluded. Louis walked to the garage he had patronized on the first day of his stay in Salem and asked for the machine in which he had driven up to Aaronson's place.

"Can't let you have it," replied the owner of the garage. "It's down to Boston to-day."

"Well, let me have another," said Louis.

"Can't do it. That's the only one I've got for hire."

"Isn't there any other place where I can hire one?"

"Yes, there's one other place," the automobile man replied slowly, as though reflecting on each word. "They got one down to Boswell's garage."

"Boswell's?" echoed Louis. "You mean Miss Boswell——"

"I mean her father," came the enlightening retort. "He's got a white car that Tom, who's engaged to Boswell's daughter, drives for those that wants to hire it. I thought I saw you in it yesterday."

A sudden light broke on Louis. He dashed out of the garage, entered a neighboring drug store, and tore into the telephone booth. In a few moments he had Miss Boswell on the other end of the wire.

"That automobile ride is off," he shouted.

"Why?" came in a surprised tone over the wire.

"When I want to pay your father seven dollars an hour for a machine again I'll ring you up. I'm going to skip this town while I have a shirt left on my back."

THE COLONEL AND THE CARDS

COLONEL CECIL LYON, the Republican national committeeman from Texas, was induced one evening to sit in a poker game in New York. The play had been in progress for about an hour when a newcomer, rather the worse for strong drink, bought out a stack of chips.

On the next hand dealt, the colonel had three aces "pat." The newcomer drew three cards, and the colonel said, in a nonchalant, bored manner, he guessed he would take one. Then the betting began, and grew fiercer and fiercer. Every time the colonel raised, the stranger raised him back again. Finally Lyon called.

The other man spread out an ace-high straight. He had held the king and ace and drawn the ten, jack, and queen.

The colonel, looking like a man at the funeral of a dear relative, remarked, in shrill tones:

"Down in my State, when a man draws cards like that somebody else draws a gun."

A Chat With You

WE'VE been editing this magazine some time now. At the present writing it is growing faster than any magazine in the country. We have the written and unsolicited testimony of thousands upon thousands of readers that it is the biggest, best, and livest fiction magazine published. It is the original twice-a-month magazine, and it is the only successful twice-a-month magazine. It far outsells with every issue any other magazine displayed on the news stands. It sells per issue twice as many copies as the majority. It is representative of the work of the best story writers of our generation. It is a typical and representative American magazine. Certainly it is *the* representative fiction magazine.

IF the plain statement of generally accepted facts can be called boasting, we must plead guilty to boasting in the statements in the preceding paragraph. They were not made, however, in a spirit of self-congratulation, but rather as an introduction to the further statement that we don't think we have reached our limit yet. We feel that there are better, more vital, more interesting things in store for us in the future. What do you think about it?

EVERY mail brings us a score of letters about THE POPULAR. We can say truthfully that all of these letters contain words of approbation, very few criticisms, almost all suggestions. So far as it is possible we answer personally every letter received. We don't do this out of policy, but because we really want to. Some who write don't sign their names, and some, possibly traveling men, write us on the paper of hotels whence they have departed before our answer arrives. We want once in a while to give our readers representation on these pages. A "chat" should not be allowed to degenerate into a monologue, and though we have more to say than we can find room for, our readers have plenty of interesting things to say. The letters are all from live, interesting people; they come from every part of a white man's country, from Boston to the Golden Gate, from Saskatchewan to the Canal Zone. We get letters from every point where Americans are wont to penetrate, from China literally to Peru. Each letter represents an individual and interesting point of view, a new angle from which to take a slant at THE POPULAR.

SOME want more detective stories, some want Western stories, some want stories of business. Some say that the scenes of too many of our stories are laid in the East, some say that it's a splendid magazine, but that we are killing it by filling it with tales of cowboys and miners and ranchmen. Some, mainly from Indiana and other spots to which salt air does not penetrate, urge us to give them more sea stories. It is in-

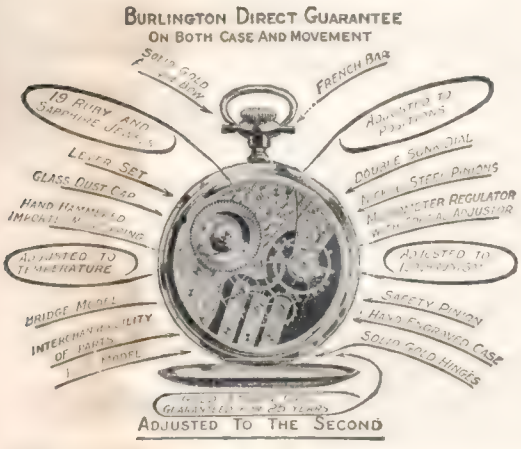
teresting also to note that those who live on the seaboard generally want to get away from it, in a literary sense, at any rate, and ask to be taken to the mountains and desert when they settle down to read. Fiction can make you forget the world about you, take you into clearer altitudes and broader horizons. So can alcohol and tobacco, but the magazine has no depressing after effects. Instead, the higher ideals and keener endeavor which the right kind of fiction brings are lasting and beneficial.

IT would be impossible to have every voter attend a State legislature in person, and it would also be impossible to print all the letters we receive. We propose, however, a few issues hence, to select a number of representative letters from various parts of the country, and from various sorts and conditions of men, and to let them speak to you in these pages. When you read them you are sure to find some one saying the things *you* would have said. If you think you represent a class and are eligible for a seat in this legislature write yourself. It is well to remember, however, that when a magazine appears simultaneously on every news stand in the country from Seattle to Key West, when the edition printed is considerably in excess of four hundred thousand copies, it must go to press some time in advance of the date of issue. These two pages are the very last part of the magazine to go to press, but if you want to be represented in them say two months from to-day you must get your letter in at once. If you think your ideas are those of any considerable number of our readers, let us hear from you.

SPEAKING of detective stories, Henry C. Rowland has written one in complete novel form. It is called "The Dog With the Broken Tooth," and will appear in the number of THE POPULAR out on the news stands two weeks from to-day. We believe we have read as many detective stories as most, but we never read one like this. The prevalent fault in a mystery story is that the statement of the mystery and the slow unraveling of a tangled skein of plot take so much space that the narrative lacks movement and action. There's no such fault with this novel. The mystery is baffling enough for the most confirmed puzzle hunter, but it is stated briefly in one short paragraph. The rest of the story is action, excitement, interest, thrill. It carries you along with a dash and buoyancy that makes the reading of it as exhilarating as a dash in a racing car. There's lots of humor in it, lots of real, lovable human people, lots of most of the things that make life worth living.

IN the same issue there is the first of a new series of stories by B. W. Sinclair. The scene is laid in the Northwest, which Sinclair has made so many know and like. They are all up to the standard of his best work. It goes without saying that they are strong and realistic. Then there is another great baseball story, "McCluskey's Prodigal," by C. E. Van Loan; there is another stirring tale of the Southwest by George Pattullo; another Alaskan story by Roy Norton, and another Sweeny story by Charles R. Barnes. There is also the first installment of a new adventure serial by Francis Whitlock, as well as short stories by R. W. Ritchie, W. B. M. Ferguson, A. M. Chisholm, Mayn Clew Garnett and others.

Fighting the Trust



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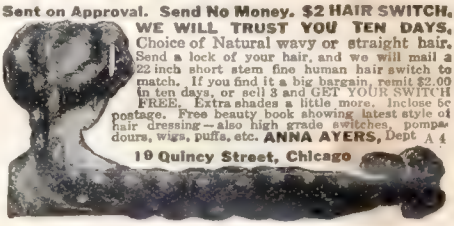

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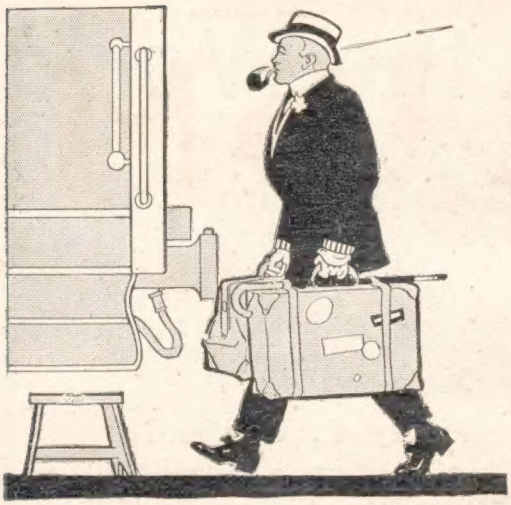
In the next number, the First June POPULAR, is a remarkable murder-mystery novel, "The Dog With the Broken Tooth," by Henry C. Rowland. *We don't want you to miss this story.*



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REALISM

February 20th, 1911.

Messrs. STREET & SMITH,
79 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

Gentlemen:—In the first October number of your POPULAR MAGAZINE appeared a little story that was a "jim dandy," and so rich in local color that the author must have written it while down in the border country in which it was laid—the Mexican border. Altho the town on the Texas side was nameless in the story, there is only one Texas border town that is opposite Matamoras, Mexico, and that has a Ruby Saloon and a "White Elephant," and in which the governor has to keep a detachment of Rangers to restrain gambling—and that is Brownsville.

The little ferry that the author describes in taking his characters to Matamoras has within the past two months been replaced by a splendid steel-structure bridge. This ferry privilege, by the way, was owned by a well-known New York banker, and materially added to his fortune. The roulette room off the old cantina, in Matamoras, which the author brings into the story, has recently been closed by the Mexican government, and the dinky little street cars will soon be replaced by up-to-date trolleys.

It seems too bad that all these land-marks of the old days, so full of interest to the visitor from the North should have to give way to more modern methods.

By a strange coincidence, I was on the train, returning from Brownsville and Matamoras, when I read the story, which probably caused it to impress me more than it might otherwise have done.

Cordially yours,

AUSTIN, TEXAS. G—— T——

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